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SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS

AND

OCCASIONS.

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AND

OCCASIONS.

BY THE
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THE writer of the following Sermons is far from supposing that they have greater merit than those generally delivered from the pulpit; and hopes to be pardoned in this attempt to render himself more extensively useful. If he succeed in exciting one sigh of real penitence, or in drying a tear of religious despondency, his aim will be attained; his purpose will not have been vain, nor the present publication unfruitful.

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SERMON I.

ON CONFIRMATION.

Acts xv. 41.

And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the Churches.

WHEN we consider the barrenness of information, relating to the internal condition of the Church, in the age of the Apostles; and that almost all our knowledge is to be gleaned from the scanty records that St. Paul and St. Luke have left us; that the one wrote principally to record the miracles by which our faith was established, and to enforce the truth of Christianity; and that the other endeavoured to reclaim, from the errors of paganism and the prepossessions of the Jews, the churches to which his epistles are addressed; and more to inculcate fun-

damental doctrines than to prescribe external rites, or rules of discipline; we shall have no cause to wonder, that the service and ordinances of the primitive Church are so little known, and must be traced with such difficulty. By the adventitious lights, however, which these writers, and others of less note, have thrown on the first pages of ecclesiastical history, we can plainly discern the vestiges of those rites, in which the great majority of christians have invariably walked; which are not less necessary than ancient, not less valuable for their use, than venerable for their antiquity.

It is true, that many corruptions crept in during a long night of ignorance; while superstition clouded the face of truth, and made the Church of Christ appear more as the gloomy sepulchre of human happiness, than as an edifice raised to the glory of God, and the security and solace of his creatures. But we have long, by God's assistance, rent the veil which obscured the sun of righteousness, and thrown off those galling fetters which

which enslave the mind, and tie it down to the footstool of a weak and fallible mortal. The Established Church of this kingdom owns no rule of life but the Gospel; no mode of discipline, no rites or ceremonies but such as are built on the precepts of Christ, or the practice of his Apostles. And it has been conceded by almost every sect of christians, by whatever name they have been known, or whatever may have been their prejudices, that whatsoever can be fairly traced to the times of the Apostles, and can be proved to have been their practice or opinion, is to be regarded with reverence, and observed with scrupulous attention. Whoever duly considers the office of these holy men, the authority by which they spake, and the sanctity of their characters, will not hastily treat their opinions with neglect, or their practice with levity. Their credentials were so clear, their fame so spotless, their faith so sublime, and yet so simple, that to reject or question the importance of their precepts, would be little less than an open denial

of the faith, and could proceed from nothing else but the arrogance of men, the influence of corrupted humanity.

Confirmation, to the use and importance of which I wish, at present, to fix your attention, is a rite so plainly derived from the practice of the Apostles, that for several ages it was universally, and is still, by a large proportion of christians, considered as a sacrament; as a necessary means of obtaining the favour of God, and a visible conveyance of the blessings of the Gospel; and is now held by ourselves as of chief importance to the credit of the Church, and the spiritual welfare of a christian. In the observance of this rite, as practised by the Church of England, we discern no useless parade or trifling ceremony, all is plain, significant, and simple. The form is borrowed, or rather continued, from the usage of those, whose practice it should be our study to imitate, and whose mandates are of perpetual obligation. We not only read in the words of the text, that St. Paul, after the conversion, and consequent baptism

of

of many of the inhabitants of Syria and Cicilia, went through those provinces *confirming the Churches*; but in another chapter of the Acts a still earlier, and, perhaps, a stronger instance of the observance of this rite, is recorded of Peter and John, who had been sent as delegates from the apostolical college, for the express purpose of confirming the Samaritans in the faith, and *to lay their hands upon them*, after they had received the word of God, and had been admitted as converts to Christianity by baptism; which, in that age of christian purity, was the immediate consequence of a profession of faith in our Saviour, and was administered to those who could not have had time or opportunity to understand the whole doctrine of Christ, or of hearing every particular relating to their Redeemer. To confess their faith in Christ crucified; to acknowledge him as their Lord and only Saviour; to believe in his death and resurrection; seem to have been the only conditions which were required of the disciples on their conversion. *I believe*

that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, was the profession of the eunuch, which St. Philip accepted as a sufficient testimony of his faith, and a proper title to the sacrament of baptism. It was, however, expedient, that some farther instructions should be given to those who had slightly, or partially, heard the word of God, and who longed for fuller information.

This instruction, accompanied with laying on of hands, was attended with the most important and beneficial consequences, and conveyed blessings, which as much surpassed the ordinary benefits conferred on man, as they exceeded the power of any mortal. Every sincere christian, therefore, was anxious to partake of these blessings, and crowded with eager joy to the Apostles to receive imposition of hands, and to avow his faith in the Gospel. In after ages, when the extraordinary operation of the Holy Spirit had ceased; when there was less need of supernatural agency (for infinite wisdom decreed, that miracles should become more rare in exact proportion to the necessity

cessity of employing them), the rite of imposition of hands was continued, but confined to the highest order of the Church; either because none had been accustomed to use it but the Apostles, or, perhaps, to intimate, that as it was the first and most striking, so it should be reserved as the last and most solemn method of imploring the divine blessing on the heads of the faithful. If we look into the earliest dawn of history, we shall not be able to discover any ceremony more ancient than this, nor can any be more significant or natural. It was practised by the patriarchs of old, to express the earnestness of their prayer to God for the safety and welfare of their offspring, as well as the assurance, that they acted by divine authority. In this manner did Moses bless Joshua; and, by the positive command of God, constitute him leader of the Israelites. In this manner did Jacob bless Ephraim and Manasseh; in this manner did our blessed Lord himself heal those that had infirmities, and bless the children that were brought unto him.

Very properly, therefore, did the Apostles institute this solemn ordinance; and consider it as an essential part of the office of Confirmation, which was known, for many centuries, by a name expressive of this ceremony. I do not insist here on the doctrine *of laying on of hands*, mentioned by the Apostle in his epistle to the Hebrews, which text has been often adduced to prove the pristine use and authority of this rite: but as it may, perhaps, with equal propriety, be applied to the office of ordination, I purposely wave its support, being unwilling to bring forward any passage of Scripture, or other document, which is not perfectly clear and free from all doubt, or shadow of litigation.

It is not, however, of equal importance to consider the propriety or efficacy of imposition of hands in past ages, as its use, application, and expediency, as practised in our own. It is accompanied by a form of prayer, short and concise, very comprehensive, and easy to be understood: and whoever wishes to be informed

formed of the use and necessity of Confirmation, has only to open his prayer-book and peruse, with candour and seriousness, the form prescribed by our Church. This is more immediately incumbent on those who are soon to be admitted to this rite; who will then perceive, that they are about to undertake a charge the most serious in the life of man, and most important in its consequences; —to confirm and ratify the engagement which their godfathers and godmothers promised for them in baptism. The very nature and name of an engagement, necessarily implies a mutual agreement between two parties; and, in this case, includes an assurance of reward, and an obligation of obedience. The person, or rather Everlasting Father, as we are allowed to call Him, with whom we enter into a covenant, which is renewed and ratified by Confirmation, is no other than our Creator and continual Preserver; the most just, the most holy, and powerful of Beings; of whose transcendent mercy it is, that he condescends to enter at all into

into covenant with his creatures; whose justice is daily respited in our favour; in favour of those who ungratefully reject his bounty, and audaciously brave his correction: whose holiness must be hourly offended by impiety, by the wickedness of creatures, who were raised from nothing by his goodness; who are continually upheld by his mercy; and whom he has redeemed by his blood: whose power is disregarded, and often defied by those who are defended by his fatherly hand; whose life and preservation are every hour sustained by his care, and incessantly depend on his will.

The ineffable majesty of Him, who deigns to accept the imperfect obedience, and too often negligent homage of sinful men, would be enough, one would think, to inspire us with awe and reverence, when we approach him in any serious act. But these sentiments of seriousness and fear must surely be greatly heightened, when we consider, that in the rite of Confirmation we undertake an engagement to pursue a line of conduct to which all

have found it difficult to adhere; to which the propensities of our nature are adverse; from which the world, inclination, and appetite, constantly allure us; and which is still necessary to the favour of the Almighty, and our eternal peace. In this solemn ordinance, every one openly, "in the presence of God, and of the "congregation, renews the solemn pro- "mise and vow, that was made in his "name at his baptism; ratifying and "confirming the same in his own person, "and acknowledging himself bound to "believe and to do all those things which "his godfathers and godmothers then "undertook for him."

This surely is not of trifling concern; this is not an empty form, an unmeaning ceremonial act of devotion; but comes home to the breast of each individual. The question is important, comprehensive, and clear; and the answer admits of no reserve, no ambiguous turn or chance of equivocation. The simple reply, "I do," will not only be the most solemn, but also the most momentous act of your whole lives,

lives. I do renew my baptismal vows; I do, in the most ample manner, in the presence of God and man, ratify and confirm them: I do acknowledge myself bound to believe all the articles of the christian faith, and to act according to God's will here, as I hope to attain eternal joys, through the merits of my Redeemer hereafter. These are the conditions of salvation; this is the import of that rite in which you are soon to bear a part, which will either promote your spiritual welfare and eternal happiness, or aggravate your guilt, and consequently accelerate your condemnation.

With regard to the benediction pronounced by the Bishop, on the head of each person, it would be difficult to compose any more proper for the service, certainly none more adapted to our wants, or more consonant to the principles of the Gospel. All have need of defence and spiritual protection; all are assailed by temptations, insidious in their nature, destructive to their peace, and peculiar to their situation. Every condition of human

human life has seductions peculiarly its own, independent of the common allurements of sin, by which man is beguiled, and of which few can resist the attraction. The life and circumstances of each individual create a series, a constant succession of trials peculiar to his own case, and which are the more dangerous, as they are frequently unperceived by himself, till they have become superior to his strength, and have subdued his virtue.

To solicit defence, therefore, is requisite at all times, and never more so than when we profess *to take the sword of the Spirit*; when we are left without the guidance of those who promised to instruct us in infancy, and train our minds to piety and innocence; when we must no longer be esteemed as *babes in Christ*, but as the champions of the cross: when we, in our own persons, declare, that we will continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives end. But to expect to be defended by the heavenly grace of God, while we ourselves are found sinners; while our minds are ruffled by the

wish,

wish, or polluted by the enjoyment of vicious pleasure, is as preposterous as it is sinful. The grace of God is not of such little value as to be conferred, indiscriminately, on the pious and profane; on those who seek the Lord, and strive after holiness; and on those also who despise his threatenings, who heedlessly slight the rewards of Heaven, or impiously reject them. We must not expect to "continue the Lord's for ever," if we at present follow the dictates of corrupt passions, while we suffer ourselves to be seduced by vice, by the example of evil company, by the society and conduct of those who oppose his government, and who, too often, deride his power, and scoff at his name. We must not look for light from Heaven, while we willingly tread the paths of darkness; we must not hope for reward, we cannot but expect punishment, if *we forsake the guide of our youth, and forget the covenant of our God*: we cannot "increase in his holy Spirit more and more," while we wickedly neglect the means of favour, but must necessarily sink

sink into grosser iniquity, and be visited by eternal pain: we cannot "come into his everlasting kingdom," if our actions have been uniformly adverse to his glory; if our thoughts are continually opposite to his purity, and our hearts estranged from his love.

There are certain periods in the life of man, when he rests, as it were, from past action; when he may be said to pause as a traveller at the end of a stage, and is left at liberty to choose the different paths into which the high road of life is divided. There can be no stage more obvious and general, certainly none at which it will be more proper to refresh the mind with religious aliment, and to strike into the paths of righteousness, than that at which the young are invited to stop, and many of you are now arrived. Youth, indeed, is not often the season of thought, although opinions then sink deep into the mind, and are seldom relinquished till we have experienced their fallacy. Of the insufficiency of sensual pleasure, we are not often convinced till appetite is palled,

and

and sometimes the wish exceeds the power of gratification. Conviction may not arrive till the mind is too much warped by vice, to resume again the plain surface of virtue. The first attacks of sin are, therefore, the easiest to resist, and are weak in proportion to their infancy. When the insidious reptile is admitted early into the human breast, it soon vitiates the moral sense, it expels every finer feeling, and, at length, coils itself so closely round the heart, as to suffer it not to expand, or be touched by any thing good, generous, or laudable. When the soul is familiarised to guilt, it loses the hope with the clue of salvation, and, at the departure of hope, commences the reign of terror, and the want of consolation. Nothing is more pleasing than the language of hope, or natural than to hope what promises felicity. The best of us, when we think of our Creator and Judge, are too apt to lose sight of his attributes, in the contemplation of his works of creation; we forget his laws, and dwell with pleasure on the proofs of his mercy. Of his justice

we

we shall hereafter receive the fullest proof; in this world it is not so conspicuous as the exercise of clemency; for of his clemency alone it is, that we are permitted to continue upon earth. If the administration of divine justice were rigid, direct, and immediate, we should at once feel the penalties of vice; the sinner would be swept off in the instant perpetration, or sudden consequence of guilt, and would have no leisure to repeat offence, or even time to sue for pardon.

Good reason, therefore, have we to admire and to praise the covenant which infinite love has established; by which, sealed as it is, by the blood of an immaculate Saviour, we are allowed to expect reward for a willing, though imperfect, obedience; and surely our gratitude can never be more warm, piety more pure, or sincerity more expedient, than when we ratify this holy covenant, as ye are now called to do, in the Office of Confirmation. By this ordinance, as I trust has been shewn, ye renew in your own per-

sons, by your own free will and consent, and in the most effectual and solemn manner, your oaths of fidelity, and the compact of your salvation. By this ordinance is obviated every obstacle which the malice of infidelity, every cavil which the perverseness of ignorance has alledged against the baptism of infants, since its manner is as plain, and its obligations as binding and important, as the Office of Baptism; since it has been practised in the earliest and purest ages of the Church, and is not less useful in its effects, than holy in its principle.

With full persuasion then of its importance; with pure and devout sentiments of gratitude, do ye, my young friends, approach the altar of the Lord, and with sincerity and godly love acknowledge the benefits of your redemption, and avow yourselves the servants of Christ; earnestly endeavouring to conform your minds and manners to the commands and example of your Saviour and future Judge. Let this period be the happy crisis of your everlasting peace;

let it be unto you the epoch of righteousness, the commencement of a life of honesty, faith, and virtue. And when calamity shall befall, or death itself approach you, ye shall think of this season with holy and pleasing recollection, and may continually cherish the hope, that "Almighty God will direct, sanctify, and "govern your hearts and bodies in the "ways of his laws, and in the works of "his commandments; and through his "most mighty protection, both here and "ever, ye may be preserved in body and "soul, through our Lord and Saviour "Jesus Christ."

SERMON II.

ON DIVINE MEDITATION.

PSALM lxxvii. 3.

When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God.

THE beauties so thickly interspersed in the book of Psalms, are frequently overlooked in familiar perusal, and the excellence of their advice and doctrine, by long and early acquaintance, is too often passed over with negligence and slight. It is certain, however, that the instructions they contain are above the power of human abilities, and must be accounted as the immediate and genuine dictates of God. Many passages in them are so clearly prophetical, and so minutely illustrative of events, which have been long since accomplished, that we cannot question their authority; and others afford

such estimable rules of practice and conduct, in every relation of life, that whoever reads and considers them with attention, cannot restrain his admiration of their authors, nor withhold his confession of their worth.

In the Psalm, of which the text is a part, the writer manifests a firm trust in the Almighty protection; and intimates, that in every calamity, to which human nature is subject in this world, we should always rely and think upon God, on whom no one ever too implicitly depended, or too confidently clung. So various, and often so sudden are the vicissitudes of life, that we are never secure from misfortune; so liable are we to be deceived by false appearances of friendship, and by delusive hopes of protection, merely human, that all who have ever tasted the bitter cup of calamity, must have experienced the truth of that assurance of the Psalmist, *it is better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in man.*

Before

Before the promulgation of the Gospel, when men were bewildered by perplexed axioms of philosophy, and the conceits of their own fancy, there was no steady beacon to look up to, nor any ground of salvation on which they could tread with safety. Even among the Jews, whose religion contained in it the promises and covenant of the highest, there were various disputes concerning points of doctrine of very material tendency; of a resurrection to come, and a future judgment. And we are told, that a very considerable sect of them, among whom too were some of their most learned teachers, positively denied a resurrection; taught that there *was neither Angel nor Spirit;* considered this life as the ultimate end and only residence of the soul; and asserted that it, as well as the body, was annihilated by death, and irremediably sunk to corruption. On those who were influenced by such opinions, the hand of sorrow must have fallen with an heavy weight, bereft of all the comforts which this world can afford, what must be the

feelings of him who has no hope in the next? When man is converted into an enemy, what resource has he, who cannot *think upon God* as a friend? And we find, by melancholy experience, that to a large majority of human beings, this life presents nothing but disease, remorse, and distress. Penury and labour have ever been, and must be, the lot of the multitude; and when sorrow intrudes into the doors of him, who has no means of flight or exclusion; who has no protector on earth, and dares not *think upon God;* to what can he have recourse to alleviate trouble, and render him again tranquil and composed? To the rich and powerful, grief, perhaps, is still more pungent; accustomed to gratify every inclination, to have even their wishes anticipated, and to riot on the good of the land; when struck by the iron hand of disease or sorrow, they are appalled at the blow, and if not accustomed to think upon God, are the most proper objects of pity. In whatever condition of life distress or misfortune may befal us, to complain is useless,

less, although heaviness is unavoidable; it is to God only that we can cry, with any hope of attention or expectation of relief. But before we consider the use and propriety of thinking upon God in the hour of heaviness, it may not be improper to take a view of the duty of Divine Meditation in every condition of life, as well in the hours of gaiety and mirth, as in the day of heaviness and dejection.

The lot and circumstances of no man are so stable and prosperous, as to be free from the attacks of accident, and not liable to change; whatever we possess, and whatever we desire, must be confessed to proceed from Him, upon whose bounty we can have no claim; who constantly protects us from evils which we can never avert, and seldom foresee, and who often confers benefits on those who are least solicitous of his favour, and least mindful of his love. And it is a fact too deplorable to escape observation, too notorious to be denied, that the temporal gifts of Providence, instead of inciting

citing the mind to gratitude, have a tendency to choke the seeds of piety, render the heart callous to the distresses of its fellow-creatures, and heedless of its God. When the mind is clouded by opulence, seduced by appetite, or over-ruled by passion, to *think upon God* must necessarily be deemed an unpleasing and an irksome task, for divine contemplation will tell the profligate, that they are wandering out of the straight path; that their understandings are darkened, and their hearts corrupt. And yet the only method of counteracting the impression, which a crowd of worldly objects is perpetually making upon the senses, is sometimes to banish the thoughts of this world from our hearts, to *think upon God*, and consider the importance of those eternal objects, which cannot fail to be of consequence to a soul framed for immortality; and which, however we may now drive them off by vanity and dissipation, will certainly recur at a time when they will be least welcome; when we shall be least prepared to consider them; when they

they will too probably distract our thoughts and embitter recollection: for he who neglects to think upon God in the days of health and vigour, can never hope for his favour and assistance in the hour of distress and calamity. On the opinions and habits of thinking, which we indulge, and which influence our conduct in this life, depend, more than most men seem to be aware of, their eternal condition in the next; *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.* No one believes if he sows thistles, he shall reap corn: *of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes*: and the laws of God are as sure and immutable as those of nature. He whose life is vicious, cannot expect the rewards of virtue: to speak of God with irreverence, or not to think of him with thankfulness, is manifest impiety, and will surely entail upon us great and deserved punishment: not to acknowledge his goodness is highly criminal; and a fixed habit of thinking upon God is absolutely necessary to our future happiness. No one can pretend

to

to learning and information without application and study; no one can expect to arrive at knowledge without the means of attaining it: if we hope to reach the heights of science, we must begin with its very rudiments, and pursue it with assiduity and perseverance: in like manner, if we hope to attain the joys of Heaven, we must begin in this life to *think upon God*, and accustom ourselves early and often to seek his favour, implore his assistance, and celebrate his praise. And when temptation assaults us, when appetite solicits to impurity, and passion incites us to guilt, let us for a moment *think upon God*, and we shall quickly find, that passion will abate, and temptation flee before us. Let it not be thought, that Divine Meditation will repress pleasure, or at all induce melancholy or dejection: cheerfulness and serenity are its genuine offspring; the spirits of the pious are enlivened by devotion; the heart expands, and is capable of as much, or more real piety, in the hours of delight, and amidst the

the beauties of nature, as in the cell of a recluse, or the convent's denser gloom.

When *in heaviness, to think upon God*, is not only highly rational and consoling, but most natural to a soul formed for immortality. When friends forsake, and the world looks blank around us, what can afford such real satisfaction, as the rays of celestial comfort; which no cloud of adversity can darken, nor any change of fortune contract. While the mind is oppressed by sorrow, it is always more prone to dwell on evils that are past, than to fix its attention on blessings which God may furnish hereafter: but to regret continually the loss of what can never be regained, unceasingly to lament those who are for ever snatched from us by death, or to suffer our spirits to sink under the pressure of sudden or unexpected ill fortune, argues a mind destitute of those helps and advantages which God has promised and supplies, which are in the hands of every disciple of our Lord, which religion only can give, and of which guilt alone can deprive us. Amidst the troubles and vicissi-

vicissitudes of life, it is not possible to keep the mind in constant tranquillity; it must be jarred by the crush of disease, the loss of friends, or the declension of fortune: but to all these calamities the Gospel affords a sure and speedy relief; at no season of life, in no condition of humanity, does religion withhold its support; *heaviness may endure for a night, but,* to a sincere disciple of Christ, *joy cometh in the morning:* and it is as much our duty as it must be our inclination, to dispel those mists which are produced by worldly distress; which hang about the soul, and eclipse the prospect of immortality. Habitual heaviness is a disposition which does not affect our happiness more than our virtue; it is an affection which it is fruitless to yield to, and criminal to gratify; *wherefore should a living man complain?* If we be poor, we see that it is the lot of thousands, and our poverty cannot deprive us of the favour of our Maker, render us less dear to our friends, or less protected by Providence. Though the world may treat us with disregard, the proud

proud with scorn, and the vain with insulting levity; yet if we believe in his name and word, we may always *think upon God* with cheerfulness, assured of his help and consolation. If your spirits are depressed by the recent loss of a beloved friend or relative, if you *think upon God*, you must be sure that he ordereth all for the best, that *you shall see them again, and your joy no man taketh from you.* Heaviness is not unfrequently produced by illness and infirmity; but even in this case, which is often pleaded as an excuse for the language of complaint, and a life of inaction, to *think upon God* is the surest, the only remedy to cheer our souls, and drive off languor and dejection. Multiplied and solid are the pleasures which may be experienced, far from the shout of merriment or the tumult of diversion: and however vain would be the thought, to expect amusement amidst the gloom of sickness, or the hours of infirmity, yet from the sick, heaviness may be chaced, to the dying, comfort may be administered. Reflections on the goodness of God,

God, and a future immortality, afford subjects of delight as pure as they are inexhaustible; and although the prospect of death has often silenced the wit, perplexed the sceptic, and subdued the hero, yet for the innocent and humble there will always be found comfort and pleasure in thinking upon God, in the contemplation of his works, and assurance of his mercy.

Thus, a habit of thinking upon God will, in every station of life, in every contingency of fortune, produce comfort and happiness, and promote most powerfully *the effects of quietness and assurance for ever.* If, then, this truth be so undeniable and certain; if the consequences of thinking upon God tend so plainly and directly to ensure the tranquillity of the individual, and the good of society; why, it may be asked, is it so seldom resorted to, to heel those troubles with which all are necessarily, in some part of their lives, afflicted; which all agree in lamenting, and from which not one is exempt. Is it that any of us can suppose,

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that when we are in heaviness God can want the power or the will to console us; or that our condition and welfare are indifferent to him; that he has ceased to direct the affairs of this world; that *he has forgotten to be gracious*, and watches not over the children of men? An unwillingness to think upon God, perhaps, proceeds oftener from a fear of his justice, than a disbelief of his power to save us; it is an assurance, that we have more reason to expect mental uneasiness, than to hope for consolation; it is the consciousness, that we have been seldom employed in confessing his benefits, and thanking him for mercies which have been always unmerited, and often unasked; it is the certainty of having deserved punishment, that makes us backward in confiding in his favour, and soliciting his aid. When life has been passed in dissipation, riot, and intemperance; when the mind has been corrupted by vice, by every depraved affection, by the influence of passions to which every inhabitant, and every votary of Heaven must

be a stranger; when the heart is puffed up by long uninterrupted prosperity, steeled by the wish or gratification of vindictive hatred, and void of that purity and *holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord;* when the soul is thus polluted, it must indeed be brought to *think upon God* with reluctance and alarm. How can he hope for mercy from his Creator, who has denied it to his fellow-men? How can he look up to Heaven for relief and pardon, by whom relief to his poorer brethren has never been administered, by whom intreaty has been contemptuously rejected, and pardon withheld? Pitiable indeed is the condition of him who holds another in detestation, and knows not how to forgive: for the time will assuredly come, when himself will plead most earnestly for forgiveness, to a Being whose laws he has repeatedly and grossly violated, whose promises and covenant he has refused to accept, and whose power he has defied. And it is a melancholy truth, that few, if any, are free from guilt, which (if the laws were rigorously adminis-

administered, by which we must acknowledge our conduct should be regulated, and by which we must be tried) could not fail to draw down upon us punishment, as durable as it is exemplary, as dreadful as it is just. It is certain that there is no one, however temperate his practice, however bright his fame, whose life can claim the reward of Heaven; who has not, in some part of his life, either by word, by thought, or by deed, proved an ingrate to his Redeemer, a rebel to his God. Are we then for ever cut off from salvation? *Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no Physician there?* Yes! we have the sovereign balm of the Gospel; an unerring Physician in Christ: a Saviour, who knows all our wants, our distresses, and our crimes; who has promised consolation to the humble, peace to the afflicted, and pardon to the sinner; who invites us to sue to him for protection without fear or distrust: *Come unto me,* saith he, *all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your*

souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. In Him we have a comforter, on whose promises no one can ever too surely rely; who extends pardon to the guilty penitent, to the meek and lowly consolation and peace. Do not then reject his proffered kindness; do not forsake your Redeemer, He will never abandon you. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by stubbornly refusing his mercy, and impiously defying his law; but walk ye in the right path; adhere to those rules of salvation; lay up those treasures of comfort and immortal happiness which have been purchased for you, and are communicated by your Saviour; and when you are in heaviness you may, with confidence, think upon God; when you are vexed you may aptly complain.

SERMON

SERMON III.

ON PETER'S DENIAL OF CHRIST.

St. Matthew xxvi. 72.

I do not know the man.

LITTLE knowledge of Scripture is necessary to remind us of the occasion on which these words were uttered: the circumstances which gave rise to them exhibit a melancholy instance of human infirmity, when a disciple, who had approved himself most zealous in the service of his master, seemingly most attached to his person, and most obedient to his commands; in the critical hour of his trial and examination, utterly denied all intimacy and acquaintance with him. It is, indeed, lamentable to reflect, that he, who had all along continued a zealous

follower of Christ; who had withstood the calls of interest, the effects of early prejudice, and the censure of his countrymen; should, at the time when his Lord had apparently most need of the assistance of his friends, cast off all connection with him, and pretending indignation that he should be suspected as an accomplice and friend of a malefactor, should repeatedly declare, *I do not know the man.*

The behaviour of St. Peter may serve to exemplify the difference, which has often been found to exist, between genuine fortitude and mere personal bravery. At the time of the apprehension of our Lord, when *they came out with swords and staves to take him*, Peter was the first to stand up in his defence, and eagerly desirous of displaying his zeal and attachment; he did not hesitate, although he knew he was the only one armed among the Disciples, to *draw his sword, and smite a servant of the High Priest, and cut off his ear.* He was willing to fight and expose his person and his life for the protection

tection of his master, but he could not resist the reproach of being considered as the friend of one, who was then in the character of a delinquent; whom he saw treated by the magistrate as a criminal, and by the people with scorn. His valour, which would have been sufficient to have carried him through every personal danger, as appears by his readiness to contend with those who were sent to apprehend our Saviour, was not proof against the contempt and ridicule of the world; and in the very room in which the examination of Jesus was conducted, which nothing but his affection could have induced him to enter, he solemnly, and with an oath declared, *I do not know the man.*

There can be none, who have ever heard or read of Peter's denial of Christ, but must lament his weakness, and consider it as a crime: and there may be some who may think, that if placed in similar circumstances, they would have suffered the danger and penalties of being a follower of Jesus, and would have

gladly seized the opportunity of approving their faith: but if we rightly consider the practice of Christians in general, we shall, I fear, have little reason to condemn the behaviour of St. Peter, as singularly flagrant or unnaturally absurd: there was, indeed, much more excuse for him, than there could be for any professor of Christianity in the present day: he had indeed been present when most of Christ's miracles had been performed; he had, it may be said, felt in his own person, the miraculous power of our Saviour, when he was enabled to counteract the force of the elements, and to walk upon the sea; but when had he seen the great chain of prophecies completed, which has now been the case for many centuries? when had he been instructed by *one who had risen from the dead*, and been taught, that reliance on a crucified Saviour, which is the only *sure guide of our feet and lantern to our paths?* The person on whom his whole confidence was placed, was, at that very time, taking his trial for sedition, and was about to

suffer an ignominious death; bereft of those hopes, and that assurance which had supported him through three years of wandering penury, he gave way to weakness, temptation, and fear; and where is the man who can confidently assert, that his own faith and virtue would have supported him under similar circumstances? Where are we now to look for him, who has uniformly and steadily withstood the allurements of pleasure, the solicitations of interest, and the fear of scorn? The conduct of the generality of professed Christians, gives us little room to hope, that, were they assailed by such strong temptation as was St. Peter, they would have replied with greater firmness, or acted with more fidelity and zeal. It is not possible for any of us to be placed in precisely the same predicament as the Apostle, but we have all of us good grounds continually and earnestly to pray, that God would *deliver us from temptation.* We may not have the guards of a temporal governor to appease, nor the threats of legal punishment to avert; we have

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law, government, and reason, all on the side of our faith and virtue: but these, it is too often proved, are but weak supports against the temptations of avarice, the dread of ridicule, and the pressure of distress.

No man can reasonably plead, that there do not happen frequent opportunities of evincing his fidelity to his Saviour, either actively or passively, at least by the restraint of appetite, if not by positive acts of faith. No one is so situated in this world, as not to be able to prove the sincerity of his religious attachment; and if not zealously impressed with love and gratitude to his Redeemer, may, oftener than we may now suppose, incur the guilt of the crime which became a stumbling-block to St. Peter; I do not mean a professed disbelief of our Saviour, but a tacit refusal of obedience, and the little respect we pay to his commands. Although he has solemnly declared, *he that denieth me before men, him will I also deny before my Father;* we shall, I fear, have little difficulty in discovering, that there

there are few of us who are free from the guilt of wilfully rejecting the influence of his Gospel, and of virtually denying his name.

In return for the great blessings derived to us from the religion which Christ has established, it is expected that we should be grateful, and at all times confess his power, and reverence his laws. In the early ages of Christianity, the profession of the Gospel was attended with great distress and danger, and was often followed by a violent and cruel death. We read of many, who not only gave up their whole property and goods of this world for his *name's sake and the Gospel*, but joyfully confessed the name and religion of Jesus under the most agonizing tortures, even when their sufferings might have been escaped by a seemingly trivial compliance with the rites of Paganism. Would they but bow the knee to Jupiter, and throw incense on the altars of the Heathen Deities, they might have lived in security and peace, free from violence, distress, and persecution. But the primitive

tive Disciples of our Lord and his Apostles, *had not so learned Christ;* they were too well instructed in the principles of their faith, had too great reverence for their holy Redeemer, to deny, that through his mediation only they hoped for peace and consolation beyond the grave. Firmly convinced of the truth of their religion, no persuasion could entice, no menace or torture could intimidate them, from professing their assurance in the merits of their Saviour, their sure trust in the promises of their God. They were well aware, that he required from them, not merely an inward belief in his Divinity, but an avowed and public confession, that He is *the Lord, the Holy One, the Creator of Israel, their King.*

When Christianity became the established religion of the empire, its professors were, of course, secure from persecution, and were protected by the laws: but it is a melancholy truth, that as the profession of Christianity advanced, faith and piety declined; and we need not look far to perceive, that among those that

that profess themselves Christians, there are few who are ready, on account of their religion, to encounter distress or inconvenience, and fewer still who would think themselves happy, *when persecuted for righteousness sake.* A sincere profession of Christianity does not merely imply a willingness to enter into a Christian community, but a readiness to undergo, for its sake, if necessary, reproach and injury, and death itself. But how few do we see, who are willing to sacrifice the smallest part of their pleasure or repose to the honour of their Saviour; how often are we obliged to witness lukewarmness and indifference among those, who pretend to be his disciples, and see them join in the impious laugh of the profligate, and the jests of the profane? How many are there, whose lives, perhaps, are morally good and virtuous, who yet know little of that love of God, which Christ has declared to be the first and great commandment, which every sincere Christian will ardently cherish, and must most powerfully feel? How many are there, who yet

yet believe in a future state (and who is there, who thinks at all, that can reject it?) whose hearts are little influenced by the promises of their Saviour, who disregard his mediation, and indifferently value his love? They would attain the joys of immortality by any means but those prescribed by Christ; they would enter into the Kingdom of Heaven they care not how; they would be saved, it matters not by whom; absorbed in the commerce and avocations of this world, they pay no attention to that state which is to be eternal. Though they are told in the Gospel, through which (if they admit the most simple tenets of Christianity) they must admit their salvation cometh, that they *are bought with a price*, they prize not the benefit; they disregard or discredit their Saviour; they delight and indulge in those sins which are obnoxious to his purity; and, for the atonement of which, he voluntarily suffered and died.

A steady and uniform profession, that we are indeed the servants of Christ, is more particularly incumbent on us in

these days, as it is no longer infamous to reject revelation, deride its doctrines, and treat it as absurd and fabulous. Till within these very few years, a professed atheist was considered as little better than a madman; as one who strove to conceal crimes under the panoply of chaotic darkness; who wished religion to be false, because he knew he must suffer eternally if it were true; whose reason had been warped by a continued blaze of impiety, and who, as he was the avowed foe of his Maker, could never be regarded as the friend of man. But within our own memories, the *bottomless pit* has sent forth a pestilential vapour, which, *as the smoke of a great furnace*, has overspread many of the nations of the earth, and deeply tinged the manners and sentiments of every country, wherever the breath of impiety has driven it. We ourselves have seen infidelity rear its head with boldness, and in a nation which boasts of superior refinement, triumph for some time over every thing divine and sacred; and if she be now again rejected by the law of every regular

regular government, it cannot, I fear, be said, that her influence has decreased. Her votaries, though perhaps less bold, may not be less numerous or less active. It is certain, that an appearance of piety is now often scandalized as hypocrisy, and that there are many who would blush to be thought uniformly religious, or piously inclined. The prevailing and characteristic vices of every age, must necessarily change with its manners, and with the condition of the people. In the time of our Saviour, a religious deportment was the common, and, perhaps, the only means of acquiring respect and authority: his reproaches, of course, fell on those chiefly who affected more religion than they felt. In later times, when wealth, power, and consequence, are to be attained by methods in which religion has little share, we do not see men so forward in pretending to that which can procure them no temporal recompence, and may, by the world, be treated with derision and contempt.

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So far from affecting superior sanctity, many do not hesitate to throw off all regard for usages which their forefathers beheld with reverence, and which have been ever entitled to respect and veneration. That decent humility in the enquiry after divine truth; that becoming reverence which was formerly observed in the research and examination of things, which must always remain above mortal sense and comprehension, is now exchanged for pert interrogation, or petulant denial and abuse. It is no longer shameful *to stand in the way of sinners, or to sit in the seat of the scornful:* to insult or deride religion, is often deemed, among the unthinking, and this I fear will include a large proportion of mankind, a mark of genius, and of a mind that would soar above those fanciful and needless scruples, as some affect to call them, which have been known to stop heroes in the career of victory, and which, God be praised, are still held by the majority in awe.

It is undoubtedly the duty of every man, carefully to guard against those sins which are most prevalent, and into which he is most likely to fall: and since irreligion is so common, since many in this age of levity disregard alike the promises of the Gospel and its menaces; since some have so far abandoned the doctrine and fellowship of Christ as to mock at his ordinances, and openly declare, *I do not know the man:* it is more immediately incumbent on his followers *to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering;* and if we should unfortunately meet with those who deny or dispute any of those truths which Christ has established, and profanely jest at any of the doctrines of his Gospel, let us not follow a multitude to do evil, but assert, with honest zeal, the honour of our Saviour, and cheer ourselves with the reflection, *that he that confesseth Christ before men, him will He also confess before His Father, which is in Heaven.*

SERMON

SERMON IV.

ON THE DEATH OF THE SOUL.

ST. MATTHEW viii. 22.

But Jesus said unto him, Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.

AMONG the numerous precepts, speeches, and observations, recorded in the New Testament, it is remarkable, and did we not know they proceeded from the *Father of lights*, it would be surprising, that they are all so plainly intelligible to the most simple understanding, and the most uncultivated mind. Though many of them are cast in the richest mould of imagery; though they almost all indulge in the metaphors, and allude to the manners of the East, none of them are involved in perplexity, nothing more is wanting to comprehend their use or in-

tention, than an unprejudiced apprehension and an honest heart. Their language is concise, their sentiments luminous, and their meaning plain. This is more especially observable in the speeches of our Saviour: whoever attends and adheres to his directions, will never be without a guide to direct him through every difficulty or danger, or contingency of human life; and will pass with comfort and tranquillity from the cradle to the grave. His precepts are alike plain and peremptory; are never to be infringed or compromised in any accident or temptation; nor are they liable to be mistaken by any but those who pretend ignorance to avoid obedience, and misconception to conceal a crime.

Yet there have been, and ever will be, some, who affect to misunderstand the language of Scripture; and are never more happy than when they are employed in discovering in it any seeming discrepancy; they eagerly seize the most flimsy thread of contradiction, which they can assume as a clue to error, or spin into

into a veil to obscure the light of the Gospel, and embarrass its disciples with darkness and doubt. These cavils are sometimes so absurd, as more properly to excite ridicule than alarm in the breasts of the religious, did not reverence for the word of God, and compassion for the souls of these thoughtless infidels, forbid us to be amused with any thing which intrenches on the dignity of our Creator, or tends to drag down the guilty soul into deserved punishment and endless pain. However paradoxical the words of the text may appear, at the first glance, yet the slightest examination will convince us, that they contain matter which is at once simple and important. *Let the dead bury their dead.*

No one can be so stupid as to suppose, and few will be so perverse as to affirm, that these words are to be taken in a literal sense. The dead here, as in many other places in Holy Writ, must be understood to mean those who are *dead in trespasses and sins*, who are alienated from the life of God, and whose minds are as cor-

rupt as their bodies will become after the separation of the soul, which will then *return unto*, and be judged by, *God who gave it.*

That this is the true and plain meaning of the words of the text will appear, not only from a comparison of them with other passages of Scripture, but from a consideration of the scene and circumstances in which our Saviour gave this charge to the disciple. The occurrence which gave rise to our Lord's expression was briefly this:

Our Saviour had been preaching on the banks of the lake of Gennezareth, and had attracted vast multitudes to hear him, by the clearness of his arguments, as well as the importance of the subject of which he spake. To avoid the crowd, and pursue his journey without impediment, he determined to pass over to the other side; but having previously observed a young man of good disposition, and who had been particularly attentive to his instructions, he invited him to become his follower, and to embark in the propagation

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of his Gospel, which would, perhaps, entail on him much danger and difficulty, and necessarily occasion him absence from his home. But this disciple, though seemingly anxious for the promotion of religion, and the salvation of the souls of men, was unwilling to sacrifice his temporal prospects, and leave his family and his father, who, we have no reason to suppose, was already dead, and who would, probably, have been enraged at his desertion, and considered his determination to follow Christ as a wild adventure, which would procure him neither honour nor advancement, and which would probably end in the derangement of his temporal affairs, and consequently was below the ambition of the worldly, and unworthy of the wise. But *the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.* Could this disciple have insured this world's good, he meant in earnest to have applied to the concerns of the next. *Suffer me,* said he, *to go and bury my father;* let me wait till his death shall have secured to me all I want as to temporal pos-

session; let me arrange my affairs in such a manner, as to prevent their loss or diminution, and I shall then be at leisure to attend to thee, to follow thy person, to listen to thy precepts, and, by thy mediation, enter at last into eternal bliss. *But Jesus said, follow me, and let the dead bury their dead:* let those who are careless of the honour of God, and are indifferent to the success of his religion; let them pursue such things as occupy their minds, harden their hearts, and render them unfit for the Kingdom of Heaven. But do thou, who hast already made some progress in the road to virtue, who hast begun to follow my footsteps, and felt desire to attain those joys that will never fade; do thou pursue, with undeviating constancy, the path thou hast already entered, *no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God:* leave for others the brittle toys of wealth, the delights of the luxurious, and the grandeur of the proud; suffer not these phantoms of happiness to obscure the rays of the sun of righteousness;

ness; leave thy father, thy home, thy friends, and thy worldly inheritance, and follow me; follow me, if my cause is worth defending, if my promises are sure, if my rewards are precious, and if you rely on my word; *Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.*

We are not informed what effect the words of our Saviour had on the disciple, but as the Evangelist has taken no farther notice of him, we may reasonably conclude, that he returned to his father's house, and could not so far divest himself of prejudice, and a love of temporal ease, as to follow our divine Master, although his former conversation and behaviour indicated a belief in our Saviour, and hope of acceptance through his name. He chose to finish life as he had begun it; to pass his days in waiting for his paternal inheritance; in the acquisition of wealth, in a constant vicissitude of worldly amusement and care; in longing for, and at length, perhaps, attaining an inheritance that *fast fadeth away;* in the acquirement of opulence that begets envy, creates

fear,

fear, and perpetual solicitude; in the pursuit of amusements which can only interest the worldly, and gratify the vain; in cares that perplex, and designs that vitiate the mind; that choke the growth of knowledge, and throw obstacles in the road to the kingdom of God. These were his inducements to forsake Christ. And if we take into our consideration the inclinations and propensities of the great majority of the world in the present day, we shall have little reason to charge him with eccentricity, and be convinced, that he is not the only one, by innumerable multitudes, of whom it may be justly said, that *he is dead while he liveth.*

It would be equally tedious and needless to dwell here on the vanity of the ordinary pursuits of mankind, and the universal necessity of a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness. I shall, therefore, in the remainder of this discourse, point out a few of the leading evidences of sin, by which every one may convince himself, whether he can rationally hope for eternal life, or whether

ther he shall *remain in the congregation of the dead.*

The principal criterions and proofs of sin or righteousness, must be collected from the conversations of men, their opinions, and their lives. By conversation, in the common acceptation of the word, is meant their language, their habitual discourse, their accustomed and most agreeable style and manner of expression. It is as much by this as by any other test, that we can judge of the inward temper and disposition of all men: *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* Seldom can any one long conceal, or constantly feign, sentiments foreign to the disposition of his mind. Education, intercourse with good company, and a respect for the persons who compose it, may often and generally prevent coarse and improper language; but this reverence will never be perpetual, and must be always evidently forced. If the mind is fraught with error, arrogance, or impiety, it will naturally, at some time or other, discharge itself, as it will constantly

stantly long to be at ease. By his companions, therefore, every man's prevailing inclination must be soon known, and justly appreciated. It does, indeed, sometimes happen, that men affect less regard for religion than they feel; and in order, as they vainly think, to shew their wit; their superiority to fear and prejudice; their contempt of every thing that can tend at all to fetter, as they term it, their understanding or their will; they pretend more audacity than they possess; feign a disbelief of ordinances they clandestinely reverence; and deny revelations to which they secretly cling. I know not a greater sin, a surer test of having *the understanding darkened, of being alienated from the life of God, and of blindness of heart*, than thus to lend oneself to the cause of infidelity; and, for the sake of being thought above the fear of eternal punishment, to incur the guilt *of other mens sins*, forfeit the hopes of immortal happiness, scoff at our Redeemer, and, as the Apostle to the Hebrews strongly expresses it, *put him to an open shame*. It

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is certain, that nothing tends so much to wear off religious sentiments, as the constant attrition of lax and faithless conversation: the flame of infidelity is kept alive and nourished by incessant sparks of impious revelry, profane ridicule, and affected scorn. What must be the hope and last feelings of him, who has thus perverted the gift of speech, and the intellect his Creator bestowed upon him, may be easily conjectured: on the bed of death he will remember, in bitter distraction, the language in which he wickedly gloried; he will anxiously, but how impotently, catch at the once rejected offers of redemption? He will vainly strive to regain assistances he has for ever lost; he will seize every broken reed, that had ever the possibility of saving him, as an exhausted swimmer clings to the vessel that is sinking, in the mad expectation it will bear him above the surge.

Yet it is by conversation chiefly, that we can judge of the opinions of mankind; and, by our own opinions can we estimate, most fairly, our hopes of salvation,

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and the real state of our souls. Some affirm, that they cannot think as they like, that thoughts arise which they know to be vicious, and sentiments obtrude themselves which they have often found to be wrong. This is not more owing to the proneness of the human mind to vice, the necessary consequence of a corrupt nature, than to an indulgence of evil habits, to a criminal reluctance to receive conviction, to stubbornness, and foolish pride. If our thoughts be evil, our consciences cannot be clear; and we might, with equal propriety, expect an unsullied stream to flow from a miry pool, the sink of filth and corruption, as that sentiments of purity should arise in the breast of the profligate, or pious affections be expressed from his tongue. The due regulation of our thoughts is as important to our present comfort as our future salvation: in every condition of human life, they contribute to our happiness not less than our virtue; they are the harbingers and parents of every sin we commit, of every good work we perform, and of every evil

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we look for. If they be corrupt, we may be sure they are the fruits of *the Spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience;* that if indulged, they infallibly produce sin, and *death by sin;* that they proceed from a depraved heart, or, perhaps, are the suggestions of that evil spirit, who is continually on the watch *to take away the word out of our hearts, lest we should be saved*: they are the sure prognostics of the death of the soul, for *to be carnally minded is death.* But if the thoughts of our hearts be pure; if they incline to and produce gratitude, humility, and devotion to God; and charity, candour, and good-will to man; we may be equally certain, that they are the fruits of righteousness, and that they will have a happy influence on the temper, the disposition, and the conduct of our lives.

For, by our lives at last it is, that we must *let our light shine before men, and glorify our Father, who is in Heaven.* Divine wisdom has pointed out the clearest evidence of virtue; *ye shall know them by their fruits.* The life of every man forms

the truest mirror of the state of his heart; and the condition of his soul: utterly impossible is it for him, whose hopes are fixed on a life to come, to pursue, or be pleased with, the vicious indulgences which the world calls pleasure, which a depraved appetite covets as the summit of human happiness, but which are constantly rejected by those who strive to be virtuous, and which are, in reality, detested by the good. It is certain, that when the mind is framed to goodness, when we are in the habit of adding to our faith, virtue; the pleasures of sense appear dull and insipid, a life of luxury becomes tedious, and sensuality disgusting. Those who *reckon themselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ*, have wishes, joys, and comforts, to which the worldly and sensual must be for ever strangers; which they, at all times, affect to call weak, and sometimes extravagant and wild. But a convincing proof of the weight and reality of religious enjoyment, is found in its efficacy in lightening the pangs of dissolution,

tion, and in alleviating distress. All fly to the Gospel for relief, when they can procure it no where else. And though their lives may have been passed in early profligacy, in confirmed and habitual wickedness, and in old and protracted debauchery; yet they still expect to find comfort in religion, as soon as they choose and can condescend to turn to it; and presumptuously hope for mercy in a Saviour they have continually derided, and in a God, whose clemency and patience they have abused. These are the hopes of the hypocrite; these are expectations of a fool. As the tree falls, so it must lie: there is but a step between this world and the next. The instant the soul quits this frail tenement of clay, she knows her irrevocable doom; she resides among the spirits of just men made perfect; she partakes of the enchanting scenes, and joyful presages of perennial and increasing felicity; or is continually tormented by the ever-new and terrifying horrors of perdition, amidst the moanings of anguish, and the howlings of despair.

If a conviction of this important truth were impressed indelibly upon our minds; if we ever suffered the idea of death and its consequences to arise, and affect us as it ought; is it possible that we should think so ill, and act so wickedly? Must we not acknowledge ourselves dead to every principle of true religion, to every pious affection, to every hope of Heaven, and even to the fear of eternal, and actually threatened punishment; when our thoughts are engrossed by the wish and acquisition of this world's good? when our conversation is constantly frivolous, and often profane? when our lives are spent in wickedness, folly, and dissipation? The confession of spiritual death is, indeed, but rare, but the frequency and reality of it is certain: the malevolence, rancour, pride, avarice, and profligacy, which we daily see around us, are so many symptoms, not only of the general decay of piety, but of the spiritual death of each individual; of that eternal destruction described and threatened

ened by our Saviour, when he says, *Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him, which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him.*

SERMON V.

ON ANGER.

GENESIS xlix. 7.

Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

THE words of the dying have, in all ages, been listened to with attention, and their exhortations regarded with reverence and respect: and it is an opinion, not less universal than antient, that at the time of their departure out of this world, good men have been indulged with a prescience of futurity, and have obtained a glimpse of those scenes in which their descendants were to act. There are extant many instances, even in profane history, of those who have predicted circumstances, which must have been, at

the time, improbable; and which it must have been impossible that human knowledge should foresee. Whether the predictions of pagan heroes and philosophers have been verified by subsequent events, it is not my present intention to inquire; I have mentioned them only to prove the universality of this opinion, which could have proceeded only from tradition, that the early inhabitants of the world were enabled, at the close of life, to predict events which their posterity would perform, and Providence decree.

It can never be supposed, that the blessings pronounced by the Patriarchs on their posterity were conferred by caprice, allotted by favour, or governed by human whim: temporal blessings were indeed attached to, and conveyed by, the blessings of the Patriarchs; but a superior power influenced their minds, and directed their tongue; their last words were received by their children as their testament; and to secure the ultimate blessing of their father, was the anxious wish of every descendant of Abraham,

of whose posterity the Almighty was known to be peculiarly careful, and on whom he had promised his choicest blessings should be shed. It is apparent, that Jacob spoke by the immediate direction of God; for how, otherwise, can we account for his intimate knowledge and description, not only of the genius and disposition of his children, but the future condition of their posterity? Human sagacity could never discover, human intellect would never have imagined, that the descendants of any man would all retain the same inclinations, habits, and temper, which had characterised their progenitor: yet Jacob not only evinced the most marked and clear acquaintance with the different minds and disposition of his children, but even foretold the character and condition of their remote posterity; when the customs of the world would be changed, when the usages of their forefathers would be neglected, and his own simple manners forgotten.

In the hasty, but comprehensive sketch, which Moses has given us of the manners

of this early period, we discover the same passions and sentiments which have since disturbed the quiet of society, and have been ever known to influence the conduct of man. He describes events and characters with a fairness and accuracy which constitute at once the beauty of his history, and the seal of its credibility; and which afford the strongest proof, that he had less regard for the veneration in which himself and his ancestors were to be held in future ages, than for the sanctity of truth. Himself a descendant of Levi, he records, with scrupulous exactness, the failings and vices of his ancestors, and the future fate of his family: the prophecy was literally accomplished; the tribes of Simeon and Levi having no particular portion of the promised land allotted to them; *the inheritance of Simeon being within the inheritance of the children of Judah;* and tradition reports, that this tribe was at length reduced to such narrow circumstances, that most of them obtained their livelihood by instructing the children of the rest. The curse on the tribe

tribe of Levi in consequence, it would seem, of their zeal for God's honour, manifested at the descent of Moses from Mount Sinai, was, indeed, soon after converted into a blessing, being accepted by God instead of the first born, and sanctified as a family of priests. But still their condition corresponded with the malediction of their progenitor; their habitations being dispersed throughout the portions of the other tribes, they were literally *divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel.*

I have been led into this description of the fate of the sons of Levi and Simeon, in order to point out to you the heinous light in which their crime was considered by the Almighty, and to impress on your minds, by the example of their punishment, the enormity of their offence. There can be little need, I trust, to enter fully into the circumstances under which they acted, and which entailed on their posterity dispersion and want. It may be sufficient to mention, that a vindictive temper and settled hatred was the cause

of

of their punishment and the motive of their crime. To revenge the violation of their sister, they were guilty of the most deliberate cruelty, which stained the reputation of their families, and exposed them to the malediction of their father, and the anger of their God.

How a being could have been formed as a free agent, without passions prompting him to action, and liable to excess, it is not easy to conceive: without them, indeed, society could not exist; and it is the proper direction and guidance of these passions, that create our virtue and our happiness: none of them, when properly applied, are without their use or gratification; the least gratifying to a benevolent mind, though, perhaps, under due correction and restraint, not the least useful, probably is Anger. So seldom, indeed, does the influence of this passion tend to the happiness of an individual, or the welfare of society, that philosophers, of no mean estimation, have maintained it to be, in all cases, faulty and blameable; we wish not, however, to concern ourselves

ourselves with the conceits of those whose maxims and precepts, however wise and admirable they may appear, when considered as the deductions of human intellect, cannot be compared, in theoretic excellence or practical utility, with the commands and example of Almighty God. That Anger is not at all times sinful, we may be assured, not only from the precept of the Apostle, *be ye angry and sin not*, but from the manner in which it is sometimes mentioned in other places of Scripture, and from examples *written for our learning*, of its operation on the language and conduct of those, whose characters are held up for our imitation, and whose practice, under the influence of a just indignation, is mentioned, not only without censure, but with praise. When Moses descended from Mount Sinai, and beheld the children of Israel defiling themselves with idolatry, and worshipping a golden calf, at the very time when their Creator, who had so lately brought them out of the house of bondage, had given him laws and ordinances

dinances to check their wayward passions, and lead them to happiness: when he perceived them so forgetful of the benefits of God, as to reject his Government, and shelter, so ungrateful to their Divine Protector as to frame a golden idol, and imitate the nations around them in their impious rites and practices; *when he saw*, it is recorded, *the golden calf and the dancing, his anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hand, and brake them beneath the Mount:* so far was the anger of Moses, in this instance, culpable in the sight of God, that it was not but for his earnest and repeated prayer and supplication, that He *pardoned their iniquity and their sin, and took them again for his inheritance.*

Another and still more satisfactory proof, that a sudden feeling and expression of resentment is not at all times sinful, may be collected from the example of Him, *who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;* whose life was one continued scene of meekness, benevolence, and good will; *who, when he was reviled,*

reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, though possessed of omnipotent power, *threatened not; who was meek and lowly;* and who, even in the last agonies of the Cross, prayed for his murderers;—even the example of our blessed Saviour; who, when struck by a servant of the High Priest, answered in a strain of just reproach and mild resentment, *If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?* No passion certainly is criminal, except when carried to excess; they were all given for wise and benevolent purposes, to carry us with steadiness and virtue through this world, and to fit us for the happiness of that which is to come: and it is no more natural or commendable not to feel anger under an unjust accusation or unworthy treatment; than to resist the influence of other passions, to repress admiration at the sight or recital of a benevolent action, or to subdue fear when sinking in a boisterous sea.

But although we have so high authority for the sense and exercise of a just

just indignation, we must by no means suppose, that a settled indulgence of it is allowable, or that it is likely that any man should give way to the emotions of Anger, without transgressing those rules, which secure to society its happiness, and to individuals repose. So difficult is it to *be angry and sin not;* so easily are we led into error by the corrupt passions of human nature, that amidst the multiplied contentions, which we all must have observed among our neighbours, none of us can, perhaps, remember a single instance, in which any one, who surrendered himself to the guidance of this passion, did not also violate the bounds of charity, and had reason to repent of actions or language, which no sense of injury could warrant, which no resentment could justify, or reason excuse. It is pretended by some, who are not ashamed to call themselves *passionate*, that the ebullitions of Anger are irresistible; that their feelings are so finely woven, their nerves so delicately strung, they are unable to stem the tide of passion, cannot bridle intemperate

perate sallies of reproach, and must utter threats of vengeance, which no one would think of executing, and which themselves, in a calmer moment, would condemn. It is to be lamented, that a being who is indued with, and deservedly boasts of reason, should be obliged to have recourse to such weak and shallow arguments to palliate the aberration of it, and should seek to excuse the errors of the understanding, by confessing itself incapable of directing its application and use. It should be considered too, that the temper, which is so commonly called passionate, and which is, I know not for what reason, not only defended, but often frankly avowed, is, in its effects, most injurious to society, and to the comfort of private life; and is that which produces, in its own bosom, the most frequent occasions of regret and remorse. It is, I believe, generally admitted, that every one is chiefly happy or miserable at home. If then, by intemperate and causeless ebullitions of Anger, a man makes his family miserable around him,

and

and fearful without design of offending him, his wife, his children, or his servants, feel themselves happy in his absence, and too often dread his approach; he himself poisons the springs of domestic felicity, and dams up those inlets of pleasure, which afford to the virtuous the most chaste and rational gratification, the most perpetual and calmest delight. He distresses those whom it is his duty and interest to console and protect; he wonders that he finds so little comfort in the world, when himself is the parent of unhappiness, and forms the leaven of the discontent and dissatisfaction that surrounds him, and which he complains of in the rest.

But the pride of humanity has produced, in conjunction with Anger, another passion, more black in its nature, and more dreadful in its effects; a passion which, when fostered in the mind of any man, supersedes every other emotion; deafens the voice of charity, and renders him, shunned by his neighbours, and unhappy in himself: no one, I believe, ever felt

felt himself happy when in anger, or guiltless in the gratification of revenge: the latter is, indeed, a propensity so utterly dissonant to every good principle; so repugnant to that peace and serenity, which the good have always aspired after, and which even the wicked hope to attain, that it destroys every vestige of happiness, as well as of virtue, and would, indeed, seem unnatural, did not the various and multiplied crimes of mankind assure us of the corruption of our nature, and loudly tell us, that without the guidance and protection of the Holy Spirit of God, we should invariably glide down the stream of iniquity, and become the willing slaves of wickedness and vice: for however natural and gratifying it may seem to a sinful creature, to return pain to him that has inflicted it, yet morality, as well as religion, will teach us, that the wish itself is criminal; that it is a passion not implanted in man by his Creator, but one of those which his corruption has introduced. To exult in the pain or punishment of an enemy; to contrive plans

of mischief, and meditate revenge, is surely more congenial to the disposition of those spirits, whose senses are infuriated by the sufferance and certainty of eternal misery, than of man who hopes himself for pardon; who daily enjoys blessings which he must confess his transgressions have forfeited, but which his Creator does not cease to bestow.

He that duly considers his own weakness and frailty, will not long cherish sentiments of hostility: when our feelings are hurt by insolence, or our persons insulted by offence, we almost always feel more than was intended to be inflicted: and although no sores are more inveterate than those that affect the mind, we cannot experience pleasure more genuine, than when we have conquered a disposition of resentment; the heart expands, and is enlivened by the glad assurance, that we have acted as we ought, that we have gained a victory over a sinful passion, and *overcome evil with good.* There is no crime more strongly reprobated in the Gospel, than cruelty or deliberate revenge;

venge; none renders us more unworthy of, or unfit for, the enjoyment of Heaven; none is so opposite to that peace and tranquillity, which the Christian trusts he shall enjoy hereafter; none more congenial to those spirits, *who are reserved in chains of darkness for the great day.* How, indeed, can we expect happiness in a future state, the pleasures of which are directly contrary to that disposition of mind and course of action, which, in this life, we have cherished and indulged? How can we be pleased with celebrating the praises of a Benefactor, when we have been accustomed to be gratified by the punishment of an enemy: if, indeed, there can be any real gratification in the indulgence of a passion, so hostile to humanity. It has been said, that revenge is sweet, but surely its sweetness is like that of a poisonous drug, which never fails to corrupt and corrode the heart of him that feeds on it.

It was this malignant and vindictive disposition, that brought upon the tribes of Simeon and Levi the malediction of

their father; and it is this temper of mind, against which we are most particularly guarded in Scripture, and which we are chiefly bound to repress and subdue, as it tends, more than any other passion, to vitiate the soul, and to extirpate those seeds of goodness which have been implanted by our Heavenly Father, and never fails to generate those evil and corrupt principles, which not unfrequently produce crimes, at which humanity shudders, and on which everlasting punishments are denounced: it is a passion most destructive to the peace of the individual who indulges it; it admits of no communion with other affections: charity, gratitude, and benevolence are for ever swept away, and borne down by its force: no wonder then our blessed Saviour, in almost every discourse and communication which he is recorded to have had with his disciples, most earnestly recommends and inculcates the doctrine of forgiveness, since it is so immediately connected with our present and eternal happiness; since it is an attribute of the Deity

Deity on which we look with most complacency and hope, and trust, that through the merits and intercession of our Redeemer, our trespasses will *be forgiven, even as we have forgiven those who have trespassed against us.*

SERMON VI.

ON THE CONDUCT OF ST. PAUL.

Acts xxvi. 24.

Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad!

MEN have ever been ready to impute folly and absurdity to others, whose sentiments or conduct have been discordant to their own. The remark, that the intellect of one man is weak, and the opinions of another fallacious, is repeated so often, and with so little justice, that it is, as it should be, perhaps, heard with inattention, and makes but little impression on those to whom it is addressed.

Inconsistency in opinion and practice, is now, indeed, so common, that when we observe any one pursuing a course of

life different from the principles he is known to allow and profess, it excites little or no surprise; but when he sets up to publish new dogmas of faith, or fresh deductions of the understanding, all, who oppose his tenets, at once declare, that he is either influenced by interest, or led away by fanaticism. That the former was not the case of St. Paul, has been proved too often and ably by others, to allow me to hope to adduce any farther refutation of it: it may not, however, be uninteresting to enquire into the justice of the reasons which induced the Roman Governor to suppose, that his prisoner was *beside himself;* and thus, by a reviewal of the conduct and professions of St. Paul, we shall obtain full assurance of the purity of his faith, and of the certainty, not only that he was himself convinced of the truth of the cause in which he was engaged, but of the wisdom and justice of his abandoning his former habits and avowed opinions, and of embracing a religion which he had before despised, and

of

of which he had been so violent a persecutor.

When we consider the state of Christianity at the time of St. Paul's conversion; the danger it brought upon its disciples, and the contempt with which it was almost every where received, we shall not wonder that Festus, or any other heathen, should suppose any one to be mad who forsook fortune, fame, and authority, for the sake of a belief, which could not fail to bring on him disgrace and danger, and probably would produce to him extreme misery and death. It is, indeed, one of the strongest arguments in favour of Christianity; that it increased neither the power nor the reputation of its professors, but was sure to expose them to sufferings which they would otherwise have avoided, and which could only be endured in the hope of a crown of glory in another world: *if in this life only we have hope*, says St. Paul, *we are of all men most miserable.*

It is true there have been men who, wound up to a high pitch of religious frenzy,

frenzy, rather than renounce their errors, have sustained the most painful tortures; and there may, perhaps, have been instances of some who have endured, and even courted persecution, in support of a cause which they knew to have been a bad one; but none ever broached or propagated an imposture, without some temptation to deceive, some allurement to seduce them, some prospect of honour or advantage, that might soften their sufferings, and encourage them to bear their miseries with constancy and courage. The compassion and veneration of the multitude; the hope of rendering their cause and characters illustrious among their co-temporaries, and respected by posterity, may have induced some to endure great temporal hardship, and death itself, with fortitude, and even with joy. But St. Paul had none of these incentives to allure him to the profession of the Gospel, *the sect* of which he became a member *every where was spoken against*, and whatever merit he might acquire by the patient endurance of sufferings, he

was

was not likely to be reverenced or pitied by foreign nations, and he was sure of being execrated by his own.

That a man should thus brave danger, and set his own nation, nay, the whole civilized world at defiance, for the sake of a cause which he did not himself believe to be true, is so very incredible, and the improbability of it has been so fully exposed by much abler hands, that it would be needless in me to notice the arguments which infidelity has brought forward to prove, that St. Paul was an impostor, that he did not really believe what he so strongly asserted, and maintained with so much resolution and zeal. I shall therefore confine myself to the charge of religious insanity brought against him by the Roman Proconsul, and in the following discourse, adduce one or two instances drawn from the conduct and conversation of this Apostle, which, I trust, will fully establish the fact, that he was so far from being justly charged with insanity or fanaticism, that he often employed means, which were the result of the most wary prudence

prudence and caution, and which would never have been resorted to by any one, whose reason and intellect were not perfectly calm and clear.

There is no surer symptom of fanaticism or religious insanity, than headstrong rashness in asserting its tenets, and unbending obstinacy towards those who oppose or discredit them. St. Paul, it will be owned, could seldom be accused of this imprudence; his reasoning was mild, steady, and convincing; his conduct towards his opponents firm, calm, and dignified; and though he suffered perils without number, and without end, he never needlessly exposed his person to danger, or his doctrine to abuse.

In the Scripture History of his travels and apostolical labours, there are not wanting instances of his condescension to the scruples, and even the prejudices of his auditors; and whenever he could do it without betraying the interest or credit of the cause he so ardently longed to establish, he availed himself of every occasion and circumstance which might secure

secure him from disgrace or danger, and used means which, to an enthusiast, would seem improper and unfair. When at Athens, he was arraigned before the Areopagus, a court purposely instituted for the suppression of Heresy, which took cognizance of every departure from the established worship, and punished every innovation on the religious customs of their forefathers with imprisonment and death. It consisted of men, who were fully persuaded of the evil tendency of suffering novel doctrines to be promulgated; and who, though they perhaps allowed of different modes of worshipping the gods of their ancestors, yet considered religion as of the first importance, both to the interest of the individual, and the welfare of the state. Before such judges an enthusiast would have thought himself happy to be admitted to publish his tenets, and would have eagerly caught at the opportunity of signalizing himself by a contest with men, whose persons and characters were sacred, and would have hoped to have rendered his name and

cause

cause illustrious by opposition to a court, which was the dread of the tumultuous citizen, and the admiration of the world.

What was the behaviour of St. Paul when accused before this celebrated assembly, *as a setter forth of strange Gods*, and of disturbing the peace of the city, by the promulgation of doctrines of which no one knew the nature or the end? Did he, as fanatics have ever done, endeavour to vindicate himself by loading his enemies with calumny and intemperate abuse? Or did he meanly shrink from examination, and seek his safety by a recantation, or a confession of the charge? No, he exhibited neither the timidity of guilt, nor the perverseness of fanaticism. He had observed, in his visits to the different places of worship at Athens, an altar, inscribed "to the unknown God," and availing himself of the ignorance and blind idolatry of his enemies, affirmed, that this was the Deity he preached; *whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.* And this he might do without the imputation of deceit or falsehood;

hood; Christ was indeed the "unknown God," who had created and preserved them, to whom their prayers and thanksgivings of right belonged, and who, however despised and neglected by these vain and self-sufficient idolaters, had all along watched over their city, and kept them from injury and harm.

Was this insanity? Would an enthusiast have submitted to employ such a defence against his accusers? and to such an expedient of clearing himself from a charge he could not repel, and the truth of which could not otherwise be controverted or denied? It has ever been the practice of enthusiasts to treat their opponents with indecent insult and scorn; and far from yielding to the passions of individuals, or the temper of the times, they have always represented their adversaries as men, with whom it did not become them to argue, and whom it was useless to labour to convince. But St. Paul's defence was at once ingenious and dignified; it did not tamely surrender the point in dispute, nor rashly provoke the malice

malice of his enemies; it was calculated to calm their fury and sooth their prejudices; it partook not of the wild rant of an enthusiast, but was the genuine dictate of soberness and truth.

Nor is this the only instance recorded in Scripture, of the caution and prudence of St. Paul: when brought before the great council of the Jews, *he perceived that one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees.* He did not fail to avail himself of their dissention; and aware of the rancour that subsisted between them, on account of controverted points of doctrine, and principally concerning the resurrection of the dead, he hoped, that by declaring himself decidedly against the opinion of one party, he should induce the other to regard him with more favour and complacency. Instead, therefore, of at first avowing, in terms which would have been offensive to both parties, that he had returned to Jerusalem to preach Jesus, whom they had crucified, which must have inflamed against him the whole council and nation of the Jews,

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he cried out, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, of the hope and resurrection of the dead, I am called in question. By thus claiming kindred to the most considerable party, he averted the sentence and indignation of the Sanhedrim, and evinced, that his conversation and conduct was not hurried away by the rude gust of intemperate passion, but was regulated by the sober rules of prudence and good policy.

No one will deny, that this conduct was the farthest removed from that which an enthusiast would adopt; and there are some, even in this age of lukewarmness and loose principles, who would scruple to employ, what they might affect to call, a subterfuge, too mean for one whose life was dedicated to the service of the Gospel. But St. Paul, through the whole course of his ministry, exhibited a mind too noble and generous, too brave and inflexible, to be ever influenced by timidity or the fear of death: and the most that can be said of his thus endeavouring to obtain the good-will of a great part of

this council, is, that whenever opportunity occurred, without endangering the cause he preached so zealously, and giving up a material point of doctrine, he was more willing to conciliate favour than awaken malignity, and would rather win disciples by persuasion, than awe them by reproach.

None are cherished with more warm affection than the children of the fancy; and as it sometimes happens in the natural world, the more deformed and monstrous the production, the dearer it becomes to those who have begotten it and brought it up. This is assuredly the case with the offspring of the brain: whenever any one has formed an opinion which he thinks is all his own, and which has never before been heard of, he makes it the sole business of his life to cherish and support it; and to no opinions are men attached with more fond credulity, than to those which are engendered by error, and fostered by pride. St. Paul was, perhaps, freer from this weakness than any man we can recollect to have heard

heard or read of. Naturally of a warm and sanguine temper, he became closely attached to the principles in which he had been bred; he did not, as is the practice of too many in the present day, run after novel doctrines, *having itching ears*, but firmly convinced of the truth of his religion, he thought it his duty to promote its establishment and security, and to persecute all who opposed it, *even unto strange cities*. Here, perhaps, he might have been liable to blame; but if we consider the state of the heathen world at the time in which he lived; the abominable absurdities of every religion of the Gentiles; their obscene rites, and the evil tendency of many of their doctrines; his hatred to every other mode of worship but his own, which was certainly the only one pure, and of divine original, cannot appear unreasonable or unjust; and in a Jew, who conscientiously adhered to the religion of his forefathers, his persecution of the Christians, whom he justly considered as the most formidable enemies of

Judaism, cannot be imputed to enthusiasm or distempered zeal.

When in consequence of the visible and direct rays of ineffable glory, shining full upon the soul, and illuminating the whole mind of St. Paul, he became a convert to Christianity; his deportment and disposition were conformable to the habits and character he had exhibited while acting under his former principles; he was equally zealous in the cause which he was now convinced he had unjustly persecuted; indefatigable in his endeavours to promote it, *in labours more abundant* than even the original Apostles of our Lord, and patient under the most imminent perils and most grievous calamities: yet was he free from violence of temper, from that extravagance and bigotry which have ever been the most prominent features in the character of enthusiasts; his demeanour to his judges at once evinced the most calm urbanity, and the brightest innocence; he frequently, by the elegance of his manners, bespoke

bespoke the favour and esteem of his auditors, and generally prefaced his defence by a happy compliment on the person or station of his judges. *I think myself happy that I shall answer before thee*, was his address to Agrippa, who he knew must have been his enemy, being equally prompted by his duty as a king, and swayed by prejudice as a Jew, to wish for and promote the suppression of his cause and doctrine; as it tended, he supposed, to subvert established usages, and disturb the public peace.

Such then was the conduct and conversation of this holy Apostle, and such will ever be the effects of Christianity, on the minds of all who thoroughly comprehend its nature and its principles, and such surely ought to be the uniform practice of every man who professes to be a sincere disciple of our Lord, and to rest his hope of salvation on a steady compliance with the precepts of that religion, which will best promote his happiness in this life, and assuredly *bring him peace at the last.*

SERMON VII.

ON THE NECESSITY AND BENEFITS OF BAPTISM.

ST. MATTHEW iii. 15.

Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.

WHEN John the Baptist "came preaching in the wilderness of Judea," the solemnity of his appearance, the novelty of his character, and his commanding eloquence, attracted great multitudes to hear him, and induced many, who seem to have had a very imperfect knowledge of his preparatory mission and personal qualities, to promise obedience to the commands of God, and to receive the baptism of repentance. The young and the aged, the needy and the powerful, the Scribe and the Pharisee, all flocked to the

wilderness to hear, perhaps, "some new thing," or to be convinced, by the evidence of their own senses, of the excellence of his doctrine, and the authority by which he spake. So great and extraordinary do these appear to have been, that we read they all confessed him to have been a prophet, and readily embraced that baptism which, though it was to be followed by the more efficacious and holy Baptism of Christ, obliged them to repentance, and was considered as the beginning of amendment of heart, and as an avowal of the expectation of *that prophet who should come into the world.* At length "Jesus cometh to John to be bap-" tised of him;" who, being fully aware of the superiority of his person, his total exemption from sin, and of course of the inutility of baptism, exclaimed, with surprise and humility, *I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me.* Jesus did not reprove his prejudice, nor deny the justice of his observation; but in order to comply with the customs and manners of the Jews, or, perhaps, rather to afford

afford John an opportunity of beholding the Divine evidence, by which he was to be assured that Jesus was indeed the Christ, and which followed immediately after his ascension from the water, replied, *suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.*

There is no greater proof of the corruption and perversity of human nature, than the propensity which man has, in every age, betrayed to pervert the plain sense of scripture, to distort the most positive precepts and clearest doctrines of our Saviour, and to make the obligation to fulfil all righteousness, a matter of pert debate and frivolous enquiry. Were our knowledge of the Deity, and of our condition in a life to come, to be collected only from the discoveries of unassisted reason, it would, indeed, be small and unsatisfactory; but our beneficent Creator has given us every assistance to discern, and every aid to practise, the doctrines and dictates of purity and virtue: there needs little instruction to make us understand, that man is far removed from his

his original innocence; we need not search the scriptures to be informed, that though *God made man in his own image*, yet he has *sought out to himself many inventions:* the inward workings of our minds, the most common propensities, the ordinary thoughts and feelings of every man, when left without a guide to assist him, are, it must be confessed with sorrow, *only evil continually.* Philosophers may boast of the depth of their research, and the progress they have made in political science and moral equity; but when did man, by natural instinct, by the mere light of reason, publish or complete any code of precepts which was suited to prevent or check the evil propensities of corrupted nature; which would lead him to happiness, or prescribe laws for perfect morality? Which of the sages of antiquity, so famed for their maxims, their ethics, their directions for virtue and social duty, ever propagated a precept so plain, so simple, so well adapted to the capacity and condition of every man, as that divine rule edited by

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our Saviour:—*Whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them?* No; the taint of the sin of our first parents has too deeply tinged the nature and understanding of their posterity to suffer them to discover, much less to practise, without the aid of their Maker, the purity necessary for partaking or enjoying the delights of Heaven, even the wayward passions of infancy too surely prove, that the confession of the Psalmist is applicable to every man:—*Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

The doctrine of original sin, if it be not admitted as a fundamental article of our religion, must, at least, be allowed to afford the best and most satisfactory account of its deceitfulness and frequency; and if this consideration be properly acted upon, it will best promote a desire of amendment, will repress presumption, and animate us with gratitude to our Redeemer, and love for our God. He that confesses an inclination to sin, and its propinquity to our nature, will certainly be

be most ready and vigilant in guarding against its insidious approach; and how much soever this doctrine may have been regarded by the heedless with contempt, and by the proud with disdain, we can no otherwise understand the propriety or beneficence of the Gospel institution; on no other principle can we reconcile the humiliation, death, and sufferings of *Jesus Christ the righteous*, with the justice of God, his mercy, or his love. And how can we otherwise account for that general negligence in the practice of duties, by which the protection of Heaven is propitiated, and favour secured; when such negligence can neither promote pleasure nor procure advantage? How can we, in any other way, explain that sluggish reluctance to devotion, so generally practised, and so justly deplored, than by the melancholy conviction, that there remains in the mind a bias to impurity; that an address to our Maker, and the consideration of his goodness, is often less gratifying than the most vain and idle amusements, and even the lassitude of sloth?

But

But many are unwilling to admit the actual corruption of man, on the supposition that this opinion would loosen the bands of amity, and would rob them of that genuine pleasure which is produced by supposing that mankind, in general, are virtuous and benevolent, ready to assist the weak, and comfort the miserable; that if men were so far gone in original impurity, the heart would be incapable of those generous feelings and liberal principles, which often do honour to our nature, and produce the most enlarged sentiments of benevolence and social love. This objection is defeated, I will not say by the general practice of the world, but by the reflection and the knowledge of our redemption from sin and corruption by the death and merits of our Saviour, *for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* Whatever, therefore, is praiseworthy in our life or nature, whatever inclinations we may feel in our hearts of piety to God, or charity to man, must be attributed to his influence, and to him the glory

glory of them is due. They do afford us, indeed, at the time, and in the recollection, the greatest and most rational delight; as they are the best and most convincing proofs that the mind is inclined to virtue and godliness, and most powerfully promote the assurance that we are the children of God, and heirs of eternal life. The doctrines, and the practice of Christianity, are so intimately blended, that they cannot be separated, or be cherished apart. The faithful and humble Christian will never be bereft of the glad assurance, that his duty is in unison with his happiness; in every condition of life he will be comforted and guided by the aids of the Gospel, and the consolations of religious hope. It is this, indeed, which renders the state of the faithful, in apparently the most calamitous circumstances, so much superior to that of the infidel, whose only hope is in the shade of everlasting night, and whose more certain fear is the gleam of fire which is unquenchable.

Our

Our Heavenly Father, pitying his degenerate creatures, beneficently inclined to pardon their propensity to sin, and determined to reclaim them from universal wickedness and consequent misery, hath, with the most unspeakable mercy, adopted us as his children, after we, by our own iniquity, had forfeited his fatherly protection, and impiously distrusted his love. He hath *by the precious blood of Christ* appointed the means of restoration to his favour, and reinstated us in the same rank and similitude which our first parents so bountifully enjoyed, and so deservedly lost. For notwithstanding we are the offspring of a guilty lineage, notwithstanding the influence of our passions continually soliciting and betraying us to transgression, and to rebel against our Maker; notwithstanding *the heart of the sons of men is full of evil*, notwithstanding the multiplied and numberless instances of rebellion and ingratitude to our Creator, open insults of his power, and impious profanations of his name, the Almighty still condescends to adopt us again into his

his family, to admit us to the privileges of *children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

This pardon and adoption cannot be supposed to be granted without some acknowledgment on our part, some confession of his kindness, some promise of obedience to his word. Accordingly at our baptism, which is to be regarded as a federal rite, which gives us the privileges and title of the children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven, we on our part make by our sponsors a full renunciation of sin, whether produced by an invisible and subtile adversary, or whether it be the effect of a weak and depraved appetite. We are required to "renounce the Devil and all his works, "the vain pomp and glory of the world, "with all covetous desires of the same, "and the carnal desires of the flesh." To be utter strangers to the corrupted affections incident to man, or to be completely exempted from their influence, is not to be expected; nor is it, perhaps, attainable

attainable by a human and a fallen creature: we are only required, according to the excellent and rational form prescribed by our church, to promise that we "will "not follow nor be led by them." Which promise may be made with confidence, and be kept with ease by those who rightly employ the blessings procured for them by the death and mediation of Jesus Christ. To those, indeed, who attend rigidly to the consequences of sin, who without reflecting on the love and superabundant merits of their Saviour, have yielded to an overweening fear of the effects of corruption, and are too apt to distrust the protection and mercy of the Almighty: the conditions of the new covenant may, perhaps, appear harsh and severe. Conscious of the multiplicity and strength of the enemies of godliness, aware that we have to oppose and overcome the urgent calls of corrupted appetite, the tendency and allurements of bad example, and I fear, I may add, the general practice of the world, strengthened by the wiles and efforts of an insiduous

spiritual enemy; many weak, though very pious, minds have suffered apprehensions which must ever be needless, and are totally unscriptural, which the word of God is expressly promulged and is adapted to lighten; and from the objects of which it affords the most ample defence.

When we are required to renounce the world, it cannot be understood to mean, that the blessings which the Almighty has spread in infinite profusion on this lower creation, are to be refused with mortifying self-denial, and regarded with contempt; they were all given for the use and comfort of man, and it is only the abuse and excessive indulgence of them that is detrimental to our spiritual welfare. And it is no less certainly than wisely ordered that the inordinate indulgence of pleasure is not more sinful in the sight of God, than pernicious to our future happiness, and even to our present repose. While our passions are kept under the guidance and influence of religion, they form the firmest band of social and moral excellence, and contribute alike to our prosperity

prosperity and our virtue. A renunciation of them would, indeed, be slavery; and might with justice be considered as an abdication of the privileges of our nature, as a voluntary and galling servitude which could neither promote the glory of God, nor the happiness of his creatures.

It will conduce much to the right understanding of the sacrament of baptism, and will best explain its use and necessity, if we consider the ordinance it superseded. When the Almighty vouchsafed to enter into a covenant with Abraham, and to adopt his family as his peculiar inheritance, he appointed circumcision as the seal and token of the compact, which was to secure to his posterity blessings superior to their fellow-creatures, and assure them of his fatherly protection and love. The analogy between circumcision and baptism will be more apparent if we consider that each of them was applied, when we enter into an agreement with God to forsake sin, in order to obtain pardon of guilt, and future protection by faith in his word, and obedience

to his law. It is not the least weighty of the arguments in favour of Christianity, that its doctrines are so closely woven, not only with each other, but with all preceding revelations of God, that we can reject none without weakening our faith in the rest. Thus to understand the necessity of baptism, to comprehend the use and efficacy of entering into a covenant with our Maker, we must admit and believe the doctrine of original sin, and the fatal consequences of the corruption of our first parents. As Christianity has followed, and is built on the faith of the Jews, so has baptism superseded and annulled the necessity of circumcision. Judaism must be considered as the parent stock, and Christianity as the branch that beareth the fruits of righteousness. They are, indeed, so intimately blended, that their doctrines form necessarily one connected volume of faith. The religion of Christ is so closely engrafted on the history of the people of Israel, that it is impossible to understand the one without some knowledge of the other. And as the

the initiatory rite of reception into the Jewish religion was established as the seal of the old covenant, so must baptism be regarded as *the circumcision made without hands in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.*

No one, I apprehend, will deny, that our Creator has an absolute right to our obedience without any promise of reward or expectation of advantage. *In him we live and move, and have our being;* from him is derived every blessing we enjoy, and every good we hope for. It is a subject of unbounded thankfulness and praise, that he has vouchsafed at all to enter into covenant with his creatures, and assure them of reward if they abstain from evil, love God, and keep his commandments. And so mild is his law, and so infinite his mercy, that although the precepts of the Gospel teach that *it becometh us to fulfil* all *righteousness;* yet the Almighty, *who knoweth what is in man,* will, on the involuntary and hasty commission of sin, pity our weakness and pardon our infirmity. But the knowledge

of this weakness, instead of providing an excuse for our errors, ought in justice to make us more vigilant and careful: we are aware of, and have been cautioned against the danger, and it behoves us to avoid and resist it. Though the approach to the maze of wickedness may be spread with flowers which seem to invite repose, and to promise delicious security; yet when we are assured that the path terminates in darkness, to hesitate is folly, and to advance is destruction; the declivity of the way may at first be easy and gentle, our progress will be seldom perceived, and is scarcely resistible: the senses soon become intoxicated with the changes or repetition of vicious indulgence, the danger is not discovered till we find ourselves on the brink of the pit of unending misery, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

It should never be forgotten, that every sin we commit is a direct violation of our baptismal covenant, that we thereby renounce and abandon all claim and expectation of assistance from God, and of the blessings

blessings which every sincere disciple of Christ must confess to constitute his truest happiness, and his greatest good. The Gospel dispensation allows of no reservation of offences, to which passion may solicit, which custom may seem to palliate, and which, by the world, may be called venial; every direct and known transgression of the law of God is as much an affront to the Majesty of Heaven, and as justly obnoxious to his wrath, as any of those crimes which are punished by laws which men have framed for the defence and good of society. "*He that* "*offendeth in one point,*" saith St. James, "*is guilty of all.*" He that deliberately and calmly executes or meditates any action, which he knows is adverse to the precepts and laws of his Saviour, sets at nought the whole system of the Christian covenant, violates the purity of the Gospel, and denies or contemns the justice and the power of God. The servants of Christ must unavoidably incur the displeasure of their Lord, if they serve the Prince of Darkness, and by voluntarily engaging in

guilt, directly or virtually declare, that they feel more pleasure in the service of sin, than in the assurance of his favour, and obedience to his word.

St. Peter assures us, that the *baptism* which *doth save us is not* only *the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God:* which answer can only be given by those who earnestly and devoutly strive to conform to the example of their Saviour, who faithfully adhere to that engagement which was made at their baptism, and who *count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.* The outward ordinance, therefore, however useful and necessary it may be, and certainly is towards accomplishing the obligation *to fulfil all righteousness*, will not, by its own intrinsic excellency, procure for the abandoned profligate, the hardened sinner, or the disdainful infidel, inheritance into the kingdom of Heaven. The service of God, into which they once professed to enter, will make their enormities more palpable and glaring; the remembrance

remembrance and knowledge of the benefits which they have forsaken will poison their peace, render their pleasures tasteless, and their life a burden: and when they find themselves descending into that state when sensual pleasures pall, and the light of truth breaks in and astounds them, they will feel bitterly the loss of those consolations which the sacraments of God bestow, and which, through his mercy, they might have confidently hoped for *by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.*

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

ON OUR EARTHLY PILGRIMAGE.

GENESIS xxiii. former part of verse 4.

I am a stranger and a sojourner with you.

THESE words were uttered by one whose whole life had been passed in travelling from one country to another, who had scarcely ever possessed any settled habitation, and who, though blessed by the Almighty with the most brilliant prospects of future greatness, had seldom known the comforts of kindred society, or experienced those delights, which men naturally hope for, and expect from their home. So forcibly does this expectation operate, and so universally is it felt, that when Abraham had occasion to request a favour from the sons of Heth, he knew he

he could not awaken their pity more effectually, than by declaring himself homeless and a stranger: *I am a stranger and a sojourner with you; give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.*

In every age and country of civilized man, a stranger has been considered as entitled to protection, and has been allowed to claim from the benevolent pity and respect. There have been, indeed, and I lament to add, there still are nations, where the name of stranger is synonimous with that of enemy, where benevolence is considered as a weakness, and compassion as a crime: but these are countries in which human nature is sunk to its lowest ebb, where man only proves his superiority over the brute creation, by being more subtle in pursuing and entrapping his adversary, by being more triumphantly savage, more ingeniously cruel.

The mind of every man, when he first feels himself absent from his friends and country, becomes sensibly enervated, and shrinks

shrinks from evils which were before unknown, and are, perhaps, imaginary; for it has been often proved that those who have been foremost amidst their companions to brave hardship, and defy danger, when alone in a strange country have felt themselves feeble and defenceless, and have sunk under misfortunes, which might otherwise have appeared trivial. Almost every man is more affected by adventitious circumstances, than he is often himself conscious of, or than he is ever willing to own; when left unexpectedly by our friends, we naturally feel disconsolate, and in the midst of those, with whose language, disposition, and manners, he is totally unacquainted, the bravest man has confessed himself forlorn and deserted; has called to remembrance a thousand nameless comforts of which he before neither knew the value nor the existence, has felt that we all depend on each other for convenience and for happiness, has caught at every mark of friendship offered to him by a stranger, and hailed the meanest individual as a comrade

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and a friend. The slightest vestige of humanity on a desert shore cheers the heart of the shipwrecked mariner, and the mute signs of cordiality, indicated by a savage, awaken the memory of kindnesses which endear to him his family and home.

When the Almighty selected Abraham from amidst his idolatrous brethren, and promised to him blessings, which as much surpassed the ordinary benefits conferred on the human race, as they must have done his own hopes and expectations: he did not bestow on him complete temporal happiness: the life of the Patriarch, though generally prosperous, was chequered by many of the troubles which in this world will ever be incident to man. Though blessed with numerous and increasing flocks, the only source of opulence at that time known in the world, he by no means tasted the full measure of happiness; nor were his habits and circumstances likely to bestow it, for although the pastoral life may have afforded the most pleasing subjects for the poet and

the painter, and the most admired compositions of antiquity have certainly been adorned by images drawn from the early and roving condition of our forefathers; yet it is evident that the interests nor the pleasures of society are not to be attained or pursued in the tent or the field. When families become numerous, their wants and views are increased, the strong will be ambitious of dominion, and the weak will solicit support; the active, and, perhaps, natural spirit of emulation, will not be confined to the benevolent purposes of mutual assistance: and when pre-eminence cannot easily be attained by honesty and labour, recourse will ever be had to hostility and force. The simple manners, and quiet deportment of Abraham and Lot, could not restrain the turbulent and emulous disposition of their servants from breaking out into contention; and the peaceful temper of Abraham induced him rather to part with a rich and fertile possession, than to live among his neighbours in discord and strife. That a life of wandering was not agreeable to his temper,

appears

appears by the manner in which he mentions it, he is endeavouring to excite the compassion of the children of Heth, when he declares, *I am a stranger and a sojourner with you.*

These words must surely be considered as the language of complaint, and are not confined to the case and condition of the Patriarch, but may be extended, and have been repeatedly applied to the circumstances of all men, and to signify the uncertainty and limited duration of human life. No one, who either hopes or fears a life hereafter, will hesitate to confess that here we have no "abiding city," that we are literally strangers and sojourners upon earth. Every object which can attract our attention, every creature which creeps in our path, must forcibly impress on the mind the fixed and determinate truth, that this world is not our habitation, or our place of rest. Even to our pagan ancestors, this world appeared by no means as the settled and proper residence of the soul, to some indeed it presented amusement and gaiety, but to the

the far greater part of human kind, it was always a place of labour, vexation, and distress. Some of the philosophers of old pretended to teach the certainty, or at least the probability of a future existence, and held up to their followers the hopes of immortality and eternal bliss: but when they attempted to look beyond the grave, all was dark and interminable, they could discern nothing but the terrific phantoms of fancy, obscured by the clouds of perplexity and doubt; till the sun of righteousness arose, and clearing the celestial prospect, presented to the eye of faith the vast realms of immortality; and though it may not at once have discovered the last seat of divinity, it pointed out the most prominent objects in the distance, and directed our attention to the surest grounds of credibility and the brightest beacons of our hope.

Yet though the prospect of another life is clear, though we be certain that another world is prepared for us, that according to our behaviour in this state of probation, our future and eternal condition will be

determined, and that ever'asting happiness or misery is now within our grasp; how few are there, who regulate their conduct by rules which are plain and easy, which have been prescribed by infinite goodness, and by a steady adherence to which, our Saviour has promised that happiness which all believe to be attainable, but which few, it would seem, think worthy their pursuit. Though we feel ourselves strangers in this world, we are at no pains to seek for and secure a home in the next: so fascinated are we by the brittle enjoyments of this temporary scene, that we seldom think of those joys *that the Lord hath prepared for those that love him.* Most of us, indeed, are so much engaged in the acquisition of wealth, of power, or promotion, so universally are the goods of this world valued, and so greedily are they sought, that we have no time to consider or to prize the eternal rewards of the next. And when men have attained as much or more of this world's good, as would, it might be thought, glut ambition and satisfy avarice, they value it so highly,

and, though it may, perhaps, afford them little real enjoyment, they esteem it so precious and durable, that all thoughts of leaving it seem distant and improbable; and this vain hope of lasting possession increases with the time which should render it more weak: how frequently do we hear old age garrulous in the praise of that, which it is so soon to part with; how often does it attempt to build new pinacles on the towers of human ambition, when the pile itself is tottering, and the base on which it rests is fast falling to decay.

The assurance that we are strangers and sojourners upon earth affords to the poor and miserable as much real comfort, as it does to the rich and sensual, apprehension and alarm. When we are confident that this life is but a passage to another, we are of course little anxious about our present enjoyments: when our attention is fixed on another country, and that an heavenly, the delights of this life pass by us unheeded and unprized. To those then whose present situation is

pitiable, the view of immortality must present the surest ground of consolation, the most pleasing prospect of hope. Whatever calamities may befall him, whose wishes are centered beyond the present transitory scene, they are borne not only with patience but even with joy; he is sure that his patience will be eternally rewarded, that he is but *a stranger and a sojourner* upon earth; he is certain that the joys of a terrestrial paradise are as evanescent as they are glittering, and considers those who now bask in the sunshine of prosperity, as the fluttering insects of a day, as summer flies, which the first blast of adversity will drive away, the first change of season disperse: his own views are not terminated by the bounds of mortality, but extend to the regions of celestial happiness, he waits with meek and grateful hope for an eternal mansion purchased and provided for him by his Saviour, he looks to his home, which he knows is prepared for him, *to a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

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Such being confessedly our real condition, and such the benefits accruing from a right estimate of human life; let us frequently reflect on the important change, which our departure out of this world will make on the temper of our minds, and on our eternal interest; let us consider that the more disastrous has been our journey through this life, the more sweet and comfortable will appear our home in the next; let not the false joys of this transitory existence so far dazzle our senses, as to prevent us from steadily beholding the rewards which immortality has to offer, but let us, as *strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; forgetting those things, which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before;* let us *press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,* to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, power, majesty, and dominion, now and for ever.

SERMON IX.

ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

1 Tim. iii. 16.

Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.

THERE are few texts in Scripture more full and important than the one I have now recited: and though to many the truths of Christianity may appear strange and mysterious; yet to an unprejudiced and impartial mind, to every candid and diligent enquirer, they will never seem contradictory or inconsistent; for, however some particular passages, ill-understood or interpreted, may at first sight, or to a mere cursory reader, appear to militate against this assertion; yet to every one who owns the Scriptures as the oracles of God, as the sure, express word of

revelation, they will always, on a further insight, become reconcileable, if not plain and perspicuous; and it is no weak argument of their authenticity and worth, that the more closely they are studied the more evident they become, the more steadily we view the great luminary of truth, the stronger and more brilliant will be its lustre; and though the blaze may be too dazzling for those who have been long confined in the dark and gloomy caverns of superstition and ignorance; yet to those who have been accustomed to search the sacred records, they afford a clear and steady light, which will never fail to conduct them through all the mazes of difficulty, and all the intricacies of doubt.

With those who expect to find the great and infinite scheme of redemption adapted to the weak and limited comprehension of every dull investigator, it would be needless and absurd to argue or attempt to convince. But I now, I trust, address myself to those, among whom, though there may be some, who may want the means

means or the leisure to study profoundly the *mystery of godliness*, yet there are none, who are without the will, *to become wise unto salvation.*

It has never been my aim or my wish to load religion with difficulty, or perplex the minds of any with deep and intricate points of theology, nor would I now treat of the abstruse parts of Christianity; did not my duty dictate to me, that to be silent, with respect to the nature of this festival *, would but corroborate the doubts of the wavering, and afford to the infidel matter of exultation and triumph.

I have, therefore, selected this text purely with a view to confirm and illustrate some of the leading points of our religion, and to refute some of those pernicious doctrines which are now so prevalent among us. In other times it might, perhaps, have been sufficient to treat of the more familiar parts of our religious belief: but at a period like the present, when the very vitals of Christianity are attacked,

* Trinity Sunday.

when

when heresy stalks abroad in every varied shape, puts on the mask of candour, and assumes the disguise of moderation, benevolence, and good will. When vice, schism, and infidelity have entered, as it were, into one common league to crush every religious establishment, and to extirpate godliness and virtue from the earth; it becomes every one to rally round the standard of his faith, to assert with confidence, and defend with boldness, the great truths on which his best, his dearest hopes are built, and on which he relies for endless happiness, immortality, and peace.

In the single verse before us, St. Paul has enumerated many, and those the most striking features of our redemption; he does not pretend, that the vast and magnificent designs of Omnipotence, are open and level to every capacity: no; it has been the wise and benevolent intention of Providence to veil from the eyes of mortals the ineffable brightness of his glory, lest, like Moses, they should *fear exceedingly and quake*: for if, it is probable, the grand scheme

scheme of Omnipotence had been at once unrolled, the scene would have been too great for our groveling intellect; our limited faculties would be lost in contemplating the transcendent fulness of the godhead, and we should at last be compelled to exclaim, *Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God: how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.*

How absurd is it then to reject any of the revelations of God, and discredit every thing, which we cannot reconcile to our own gross understandings,- we may be sure, that in due time, God will reveal whatever is necessary and proper for us to know; but that to scrutinize the dispensations of his providence, his power, and godhead, must be vain and impious; and to reject or dispute what we may not now be able fully to understand, or to treat as false or extravagant, things that *Angels desire to look into*, cannot fail to draw down upon us the just and tremendous vengeance of Heaven. St. Paul, in the words of the text, plainly and unequivocally

quivocally asserts the divinity of our Saviour, avers that God was manifest in the flesh, and affirms that Christ is our God, as well as our Redeemer and our Judge. This passage, indeed, must be convincing to those who admit the inspiration of St. Paul, and will be of considerable weight whether we oppose the subtle, and, to many, specious arguments of the Arian, or the bolder heresy of Socinus.

God, manifest in the flesh. It would, I think, require more wit, or more effrontery, than even the free-thinkers of the present day possess, to point out at what time, or in what particular manner, God, the supreme, infinite, and eternal author of our existence, was ever manifested in the flesh, without admitting that Jesus, our Saviour and Mediator, was God and man; and, indeed, to those who allow, and who believe this twofold nature of Christ, that he voluntarily took our nature upon him, and bore our sins for us, there will be nothing in this passage offensive or repugnant. The incarnation of the Son of God,

God, his humiliation, and appearance, in the flesh, has been admitted in the purest ages, and in every part of the Christian world; and it is only by the ignorant, the unthinking, or those whose wish it is to throw obstacles in the way of the sincere believer, that it has been questioned or denied.

God, manifest in the flesh. If this had been the only passage in Scripture in which the incarnation of our Lord had been declared to us, we should even then have been bound to believe it: for it has been always acknowledged, that St. Paul wrote by the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit; and though he sometimes speaks of worldly matters, and refers to particular times and circumstances, and to the private condition of individuals; yet the grand aim and principal object of his writings is confessedly to elucidate and explain the *mystery of godliness:* his style was adapted to the persons and churches to whom his epistles are addressed: the inspiration with which he was furnished was that, which secures from error, not that

that which dictates the whole. If then we believe him to have been an inspired apostle, we must believe the doctrines he taught; we are not allowed to discredit one part of his writings, and build our faith upon the rest; we must not reject as untrue the mysteries of our redemption, because they are not to be fathomed by human understanding. Before God, with astonishing beneficence, condescended to reveal the great truths of the Gospel, all ideas of his power, goodness, and mercy, were dark and obscure; now that we approach nearer in our researches to the divinity, and are allowed to explore more fully the hidden riches of his glory: men are unwilling to believe more than they can comprehend, *professing themselves wise they become fools:* in other sciences they are satified with a limited knowledge, in the arts of civil life; in medicine and philosophical research, they admit that they know but in part, and that they have still much to learn; but in divinity, in the science in which beings of a superior nature are unlearned, they expect more

ample

ample information, and clearly to perceive celestial objects, which are not to be discovered by human intellect, nor taught by human skill.

The Apostle adverts, in the verse before us, to the most known and acknowledged circumstances of our Saviour's life and mission; and no one who has ever read the holy Scriptures, or has ever heard the solemn truths contained in the Gospel, can be at a loss to perceive; and few, one would think, would hesitate to confess, that the person in whom these qualities unite, and to whom these affirmations belong, can be no other than Jesus, whom the Apostle here explicitly pronounces to be God himself, the sole, independent principle of all things: the most august and beneficent of beings, who created, redeemed, and preserves the world, who first formed man, and afterwards bought him with his blood; *that* man who now denies his power, and would diminish his glory, who attempts to debase his dignity, and vilify his name.

Nor

Nor is this the only passage in St. Paul's epistles in which the divinity of our Saviour is affirmed: in the epistle to the Romans he calls him, *Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever.* So full, so express, so positive an affirmation of Christ's divinity by an inspired writer, would it might be supposed be sufficient to convince the most prejudiced Socinian, but to those who garble the holy writings at their pleasure, distort the plain meaning of the scriptures, and *wrest them to their own destruction*, nothing is explicit, nothing is positive, nothing is plain.

But we need not rest our belief of this great, this fundamental article of our religion, on the bare authority of St. Paul, (neither have I instanced all the passages in his Epistles in which this doctrine is discussed) the Evangelists are full of this important truth. And our Saviour has, in his Gospel, several times declared his divinity, and equality in the godhead with the Father, *I and the Father are one:* it is not possible in English to render the full meaning of this expression, in the original

original there is a clear and manifest distinction between the personality and unity of God. Besides, it is apparent that Christ does not speak of an unity of will and agreement only, but of power and authority: for when the Jews accused him of blasphemy, and were irritated that by his words, he made himself God, he did not evade the charge, nor seek to repel the accusation, by saying that he only conspired with the will of God, and was the humble instrument of his pleasure: but boldly appeals to the miracles, which he had performed in their sight, which he wrought, said he, that *ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me and I in him;* which is a plain declaration, that his authority was not merely a delegation, but an unity of power with the Father.

In another place he assures his disciples, that he would grant their requests, not by intercession and mediation with any superior being, but by his own almighty will and authority, *If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* What can be a more explicit declaration of his divinity,

and existence in the godhead, than his answer to Philip, who presumptuously demanded a proof of his mission more convincing and irrefragable, than it was proper for a disciple to ask, or, perhaps, possible for a mortal to receive. *Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us! Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me Philip? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then shew us the Father?*

And since all judgment is committed to the Son, he must have a perfect knowledge, not only of the outward and visible actions of men, but their very hopes and designs; for how otherwise, can he *bring every secret thought into judgment*, how *bring to light the hidden things of darkness*, or *manifest the counsels of the heart?* To be able to pry thus into the schemes and intentions of men, to mark their inmost wishes, and discover their criminal, though abortive designs, must be the property of Him only who is every where present, and omniscient, who knows and can answer the petitions of his servants in the remotest

remotest regions of the earth, who supplies their wants, and preserves them from evils, which they cannot foresee, and if foreseen could not avert. How these things can be understood, or accomplished by any, but the Holy One that inhabiteth eternity, is surely as great a mystery as the blessed Trinity itself.

That Christ was *God, manifest in the flesh*, is not only apparent from the appellations given him in scripture, but from the attributes ascribed to him, and from the worship we are bound and enjoined to pay him. We are commanded to render that honour to him, which can only be due to the great Creator of Heaven and earth. It has been the opinion of the wisest men in all ages, confirmed by the fundamental law of true religion, that it is the grossest impiety to adore any created being: and it is one of the earliest and clearest precepts of our Heavenly Father, that to him all reverence is due; for *I am God*, said he, *and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me.* But we are commanded to *honour*

the Son, even as we honour the Father, to own him as our Creator and Preserver, in whose power is our everlasting happiness, or our eternal death and misery, and we naturally pray to him to bestow on us the benefits we wish, and to avert the evils which we fear; to pardon our offences, and to receive us into glory. We are authorized in thus adoring and supplicating the holy Son of God by the example and practice of the first preachers and propagators of our religion: for to invoke the name of Jesus Christ was, in the first ages of the church, the peculiar mark and test of true believers; to pray for *grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ*, was the constant practice of the Apostles, and to dispense these inestimable gifts, to possess the holy spirit without measure, to communicate and apportion it to his chosen servants, is the especial property of supreme divinity, and can never belong to, or be enjoyed by, any, the most exalted created being. Well then, may Christ expect and command the most unreserved homage, and implicit obedience,

dience, since *all the angels of God worship him*, since in Him the Almighty Father shines, and reigns in joy ineffable, in never-ending, never-fading bliss.

It has been objected, that Christ owned, he was inferior to the Father, that he did not possess the full power of God, and confessed, *my Father is greater than I.* This text is often produced with a shew of triumph against those, who assert the divinity of their Redeemer, who abhor the ingratitude of debasing the honour due to their Saviour, and who adhere to the doctrines which the Apostles, and their immediate followers strenuously affirmed, and for which they suffered and died. But however difficult it may be to repel the attacks of infidelity leagued with bigotry, and armed with sarcastic ridicule; however arduous the conflict to oppose those, who thus turn our own arms against us, and attack the orthodox with weapons of celestial temper, and, as it were, snatched from on high; yet this passage will, upon examination, be found to be so far from overthrowing the

doctrine for which we contend, that it is a firm prop of the basis on which the whole pile of Christianity rests, is consonant with every interpretation we would wish to put on the scripture, and tends to establish what it is so often adduced to refute. It has never been pretended, that while our Saviour remained upon earth, he was exempt from pain or bodily infirmity, for how then could he have taken our nature upon him, and wrought redemption for us? It was necessary for our atonement that he should be *tempted like as we are*, and be subject to misery, weakness, and death. Well then might he console his Apostles, who beheld him in the lowest and most abject sphere of life, who had marked his sufferings, and observed the derision and contempt with which his religion and person were exposed, with promise of deliverance from a more august character: well might he warn them, who were themselves to suffer persecution for his name's sake and the Gospel's, and were witnesses of his apprehension as the vilest malefactor, who saw

saw him scourged, nailed to the cross, and expiring in convulsive agonies: well might he exhort and comfort them with assurance of favour from him, who had the power and the will to relieve them, and bear them through oppression and distress. In the very chapter of which these words are a part, he strives to convince them of his almighty protection, he warns them not to sink under approaching calamity, nor his own apparent defeat. He tells them I will not leave you comfortless, *I will come unto you.* They had seen him in a state of suffering, and were about to witness his ignominious and cruel death; "but be not afraid," said he, "I go away but for a season, *I will* "*come again to you.* After having volun- "tarily undergone these tortures, I shall "be received up where I was before, and "dwell in the bosom, and in the glory of "the Father. Let not your heart be "troubled, *if ye loved me, ye would rejoice,* "that I have accomplished the great "object of my humiliation, and because "I go unto the Father, to enjoy that

" *glory I had with him before the world was,*
" for *the Father is greater than I.* At pre-
" sent I appear poor, helpless, and de-
" serted, but ye shall hereafter see me,
" sitting at the right hand of Power,
" *clothed upon with majesty and honour,* and
" *dwelling in all the fullness of the godhead.*"

Let us not then discredit this important truth, because it has been perversely denied by the infidel, or misconceived by the weak; our belief on the Trinity rests on the same foundation, on which the whole of our religion depends, namely, the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God, by whose merits alone we are justified, and through whose name alone we can be saved: and by whatever our faith may be assailed, either by hardened infidelity, or the more common, though not less dangerous sallies of a loose, distempered imagination, let us adhere to it without wavering and without deceit: for as no one who has a proper conception of the rewards proffered to him in the Gospel, will be driven from the path of duty by faint and transient scintillations of ridicule,

or

or the lambent flashes of wit: neither should we surrender a necessary and important point of doctrine, because it has been controverted by those who regulate their belief according to the measure of their understanding, and pretend to comprehend all that they believe and profess. The doctrine of the Trinity is not the only point, which is not completely visible to the eye of reason, and not perceptible by human sense; for those who would reduce the godhead to a single person, have no clearer knowledge than ourselves of the eternity of God, his nature, or his will. Every thing belonging to the divine nature must necessarily be dark and unfathomable: for *wouldest thou by searching find out God, canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?* Those who refuse to admit more than can be explained by reason, absolutely discard the use and design of revelation, reject the communications of omniscience, and must be regarded as those *who will not hear*, whose want of credit in the word and truth of God arises not from paucity of evidence of divine truth,

truth, but from a rooted enmity against it, from prejudice, and criminal dislike. But *shall their unbelief make our faith of none effect? God forbid.* We should receive the great truths for which we have this day contended, not solely because they are reconcileable to reason, and may be supported by argument, but because they are revealed to us by our Creator, because we believe, and are sure, that Jesus, the Son of the living God, is, and ever was, one with the Father, that he is the only Lord, who is *the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*

SERMON

SERMON X.

ON THE CONDUCT OF JOB.

JOB xix. 21.

Have pity on me, Have pity on me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me.

JOB, the person who makes this pathetic address to his friends, in the former part of his life was blessed with every thing that man could desire, or the Almighty has ever been known to bestow. Every aim of human ambition was attained, and every wish seemed gratified. He was not only possessed of abounding opulence, and of that rank and influence which opulence joined to virtue never fails to confer, he was not only comforted by a thriving and numerous posterity, but his heart was gladdened by the assurance, that these blessings were not altogether unmerited, and by a firm trust on the favour and protection of God.

Uninstructed

Uninstructed in the forms of stated worship, and in the observance of ritual devotion, as we have reason to believe that he lived prior to the dispensation of Moses, he neglected not those easy and simple, though, perhaps not less acceptable rites, which God had appointed to expiate the offences of fallen humanity; and conscious that the heart of man is prone to evil, forward to betray, and sinful above all things, he failed not to make a constant atonement for the sins of his children, who, though their behaviour was upright, and their characters unblemished, might suffer their hearts to wander from a consideration of their Maker, and a proper obedience to him: and heedlessly fall into temptations, to which the feebleness of our nature is so liable to yield, and which perpetually assail the virtue and too often subdue the righteousness of man.

He *rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings* for his family, which were prompted by a heart teeming with gratitude to that beneficent Creator who had

had given him all things richly to enjoy. His happiness seemed firmly established; nothing was likely to mar his repose, or to disturb that peace which he had enjoyed so long and deservedly. He had every reason to hope that his days would glide prosperously down the unruffled stream of time, till they at length reached the ocean of a blessed eternity. Uninterrupted success is apt to make the heart proud, the spirits feeble, and unable to bear up against sudden or unexpected calamity: and surely none could have less expectation of distress than holy Job, who was enriched by the greatest temporal good, who was respected by his servants, beloved by his family, and happy in his home.

Before we proceed it may be proper to observe, that the book of Job must be considered as a relation of actual events, and that we have no warrant from scripture, or reason to suppose, as some sceptical writers have affirmed, that it is no more than a fictitious narration, or dramatic

matic allegory*. Such notions are utterly inconsistent with the reverence we should entertain of holy writ, and will never be indulged, or admitted by any, who have a proper sense of the contents, or writers of the sacred volume: as they tend to open a door to fancies which would weaken, if not expel, those inviolable sentiments, which are implanted by our holy faith, and which every well-instructed Christian has been taught to form of a religion which is supported by evidence too firm and sacred to be treated with indifference, or to suffer the slightest abrogation. The authenticity of the book before us is supported not only by internal evidence, but by the sanction of those whose testimony should have the greatest weight, and whose authority is unquestionable. The eloquence of the Prophet, and the precept of the Apostle, equally assure us of the existence of the person of Job, and of the truth of his character. St. James and Ezekiel both mention him

* Vide Gray's Key to the O. T. p. 230.

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in terms that afford indubitable confirmation to the history: his patience and sufferings must, therefore, be considered as real occurrences, for we have no more licence to regard them as fabulous, than any other matter of fact, the relation and credit of which has stood the lapse of time, and the test of experience.

In the midst of Job's prosperity, while he thought of nothing less than the approach of distress, or the pressure of misfortune; while his children were feasting in their elder brother's house, while his friends partook of his fare, were enlivened by his presence, and happy in his conversation, he received an account that his property was irrecoverably lost, his means of living gone, and that his whole family has perished in a whirlwind. His grief must have been proportioned to the magnitude of his loss, and heightened by the extreme difference of a state of indigence with the prosperous condition in which he had been accustomed to live, and in which distress and penury had found him. His calamities were lightened by

by no feeling eye, no friend sympathised with his distress, no voice of consolation gladdened his ear, or strove to raise his eyes from the blank and mournful prospect around him. And, at length, when he must have supposed that he had reached the bottom of the pit of sorrow, that he had borne all that want, devastation, and distress, could heap on a wretch whose all was gone beyond possibility of recovery, he felt he had still farther to fall, and a still greater distress was about to overwhelm him. His spirits were weakened by disease, he became an object of avoidance, and all who saw beheld him with aversion. His body was the loathsome abode of a soul wearied with sorrow, and borne down with accumulated woe, pain, and affliction. In this state of misery he exclaimed in a tone of anguish, *Have pity on me, have pity on me O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me.*

Nothing is more grating to the mind of the elevated, nothing more repugnant to that generosity, which often gives birth to sentiments and actions, which exalt the soul,

soul, and have done honour to humanity, than the indulgence of complaint, and the cry of supplication. To sue for pity is to renounce the rights and feelings of man, to confess mental weakness, and to acknowledge subjection. It is, therefore, the last resource of the miserable, and is often more dreaded than all the attacks of violence, or even the terrors of dissolution. In the height of prosperity, while his people awaited his nod, were anxious to prevent his wants, and anticipate direction, the mind of Job, probably, would have spurned the idea of dependance, scoffed at pity, and would have rather met the dart of death, than the voice of command, or the eye of a superior. We have no reason to suppose that Job was divested of passions, which all are known to possess, and which are common to human nature: the poignancy of his misery proves the contrary, and affords the strongest evidence, that as he felt acutely the icy gripe of distress, he must have enjoyed proportionably the sunshine of prosperity. If he had been insensible to

the good things of life, and the blessings which God had bestowed upon him, his patience would not have been a subject of praise, nor his constancy a virtue.

But his affliction arose not merely from the deprivation of temporal support, the pain of disease, or the loss of good fortune: his sufferings were considered as a chastisement; as the just and penal consequence of latent guilt, which, though it had escaped the knowledge of the world, could not be hid from the eye of the Almighty. His friends, whose errand was to comfort him, and alleviate his distress, could not otherwise account for its acuteness and severity. They knew not that *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

This treatment of Job from his friends would afford an excellent lesson in almost every circumstance of human life: there are few conditions, indeed, to which some part of the Bible is not adapted, and yet there is no book which in the present day is read with more negligence or inattention. To read without understanding is absurd,

absurd, to understand without reflection is useless, and to reflect without improvement is criminal. If the perusal of the writings which God inspired does not make us wiser men, and better Christians, the fault is in our ourselves. Instances of almost every character and condition in human nature have been there didactically written, and miraculously preserved; they have withstood the attacks of violence, the rust of time, and the proud and stupid disdain of bigoted ignorance. And if we do not attend seriously and devoutly to the lessons the holy writings every where inculcate, and often instil almost insensibly, we are guilty of the worst of negligence, of no less a crime than a contempt of the word of God, an unwillingness to share his benefits, and a refusal *to come to the light lest our deeds should be reproved.* Various are the ways by which God invites us to instruction. The history of Job, to which I wish at present principally to fix your attention, is fraught alike with precept and amusement, and if it did not form a part of

that book, which is acknowledged to come from God, and which contains the words of eternal life, would be read with avidity, and listened to with admiration. But so infatuated are the senses, so perverse the disposition, and so depraved is the nature of man, that its usefulness and sanctity are, perhaps, the only causes why it is neglected. Is then the subject uninteresting, because it is exalted? Is the matter incomprehensible, because it is important? Is the language unintelligible, because it is sublime? Are verity, sublimity, and excellence, no recommendations to attention? Are they qualities so very common as to excite no admiration? Or are they found more frequently, or in greater perfection amidst the works of fiction, and the pages of the novelist, than in the revelations of omnipotence, and the scriptures of truth? No, most men are afraid to dip into the sacred volume, because they know it will hold up a mirror in which they will discern their own deformity, lest conscience should whisper to them unpleasant truisms, and compel

compel them to turn their attention from frivolity and guilt, to seriousness, and a certain and fearful eternity.

The history of Job is the more remarkable, because it records a character of excellence, which was long misunderstood. Patience is a virtue of slow growth, and of unpleasant cultivation. At the time of the existence of Job, it was considered rather as a mark of pusillanimity, than as a subject of praise, or as worthy of imitation. And though the patience of Job is become proverbial, and was certainly more constant than most men of the present day would exercise, yet he often indulges complaint, utters loudly the cry of distress, and sighs for commiseration. His merit consisted chiefly in refusing to *charge God foolishly:* his behaviour, though highly praise-worthy, must not scrupulously be imitated, as what was meritorious in him, who had no other guide but nature, or the glimmerings of light, which the fall of man had obscured, and almost annihilated, would by no means entitle those to commendation,

who possess knowledge and comforts, of which he knew not the use, and which are afforded by Him *who hath brought life and immortality to light*, but on whom his confidence must have been faint, and unsteady his expectation. He hoped his distress would have an end, he trusted in God, and relied on his mercy and protection. But his spring of comfort had almost failed, he had not access to that *well of water springing up unto eternal life.* To the consolations of the Gospel he was a stranger: yet so great was his reliance on Divine Providence, that in his extreme distress he cried, *the hand of God hath touched me.*

It was this confident assurance that he was in the hand of a merciful God, that kept him from despair, that buoyed up his soul amidst a sea of trouble, and enabled him to encounter the wiles of Satan, and the loss of every thing which is most anxiously cherished and most tenderly loved. It is this reliance on the Almighty that has ever proved most effectual to alleviate pain, remove distress, and

and combat persecution. It is this reliance on the Almighty that can alone support us in all cases of danger and difficulty. It is this only that can conduct us safely through the temptations of the world, and bring us *to the haven where we would be.* It is the knowledge that God is every where present, that he *counteth our steps, and spieth out all our paths,* that should keep us in the right path, and make us thankful that he does not punish us instantly for crimes which we by word, by thought, or by deed, are perpetually committing against him. And let us not suppose, because we abstain from actual offences, that we can escape his all-searching eye, or his all-hearing ear; *there is not a word in our tongue, nor an inclination in our soul, but He knoweth it altogether.* To confine our wickedness to the mind, to pamper our thoughts with the remembrance of vicious pleasure, or secret wish of impurity, is to the full as criminal, as to suffer appetite to break out into action, and well deserves the reproach of our Saviour, *Ye are like unto whited sepulchres,*

which, indeed, appear beautiful without, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

It has been said that the world cannot be known but by a change of fortune, the same may with equal truth be affirmed of the human heart. While fortune favours us, while all things succeed to our wish, and sometimes beyond our expectation, to sustain the character of virtue and equanimity is not a matter of difficulty, nor is the merit great. Patience and suffering fortitude are sometimes decried by men who have never had occasion to exercise these virtues; and, on the contrary, vaunted by others whose situation in life renders them incapable of practising their performance, or of properly understanding their worth. Such an accumulation of distress, as Job experienced, is no less uncommon than the exercise of similar patience: convinced that the world must be conducted by the same divine power which so wonderfully created it, he never gave into those loose opinions which would teach us that the

the Almighty had abandoned his work, that we and all our affairs are under the dominion of fatality, or are effected and governed by chance. The peace of the world is, indeed, often disturbed by circumstances of which we cannot comprehend the source or utility, and may, perhaps, seem fortuitous, and even injurious to the honour, and contrary to the will of Omnipotence: yet they all will one day vindicate his power, and proclaim his justice, it will at last appear that they all proceed from the same continual stream of bounty, and have been necessary to assert the glory of God, and promote the happiness of his creatures.

The persuasion of holy Job that *the hand of God had touched him*, supported him in all his trials. He knew that whatever deprivation of comfort he might sustain, whatever distress might befall him, still he was in the hands of a merciful God, who had previously given him all things. He knew the same hand had often before delivered him from dangers, which would otherwise have been inevit-

able, of which the world had not thought, to which God alone was privy, and which, perhaps, himself had forgotten.

To attribute our condition, our pleasures or our pains to chance alone, is an absurdity to be equalled only by its impiety. Our happiness and misery depend more on ourselves than we generally imagine. Temperance is almost always the parent of health, and virtue will ensure us tranquillity, which, indeed, is sometimes disturbed by events which cannot be foreseen, and, therefore, cannot be prevented; but these must not be regarded as casual, but as the visitations of Him *who turneth about the world by his counsels, and causeth them to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy.* If affliction be a punishment, it is a punishment we have deserved, if it be a warning, it is a warning we all need, if it be a lesson, it is a lesson for which we should be thankful. We know from whom *cometh every good, and every perfect gift*; and when oppressed by affliction, may be equally sure, that nothing is ordered in vain,

vain, that *the hand of God hath touched* us, of that Almighty Being whose providence conducts, what his power at first created, *who covereth the Heaven with clouds, and prepareth rain for the earth, and maketh the grass to grow upon the mountains, and herb for the service of men. Who giveth fodder to all cattle, and feedeth the young ravens that call upon him,*

SERMON

SERMON XI.

ON PATRIOTISM *.

2 SAM. x. 12.

Be ye of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God, and the Lord do that which seemeth him good.

WHEN the Ammonites had invaded the Land of Promise, and had procured succours from their neighbours to dethrone David, and crush the house of Israel, the king sent out Joab with the most valiant of his people to fight and repel them. Joab seems to have been a man perfectly qualified for the trust reposed in him, and to have had a proper sense on his mind of the importance of his command, and an humble confidence in the infinite power and protection of the Almighty. He represented to his soldiers in his speech

* Fast Day, 1806.

before

before the battle, which was usual at that time, the necessity of *a good courage;* the reasons they had for supporting the cause, for which they were then drawn out, and for which many of them would probably lose their lives.

The Ammonites had most grievously and wantonly insulted the ambassadors of David, and shewed, by reiterated marks of ill-usage and contempt, that they wished for an opportunity of attacking him, and of driving him from his throne. The character of David is too well known, and his pious disposition and firm reliance on the providence of his Maker, are too fully and repeatedly demonstrated in the book of Psalms, to render it necessary for me to enlarge on the humble confidence, the sure trust, and fervent piety of that holy monarch: I will only remark, that in all his troubles and afflictions, his private sorrows and public calamities, there never escaped him any expression that betrayed distrust of his God, or of his want of power to relieve him; all his speeches breathe the hallowed strain of piety;

piety; and whatever was his fortune, *God was his high tower and his deliverer, his shield, and him in whom he did trust.* And it is certain, that the more numerous were his enemies, the more disastrous his condition, and the more gloomy his prospects —the closer did he cling to the hope of deliverance from his God, the stronger was his faith, the more earnest was his prayer.

It is not, however, my present intention to dwell on the character and conduct of the holy Psalmist: the text is part of the speech of Joab to his followers, to admonish them for what they were about to fight, and to exhort them to behave as men, who were true to their cause, and faithful to themselves, their country, and their God. *Be ye of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God, and the Lord do that which seemeth him good.*

The Israelites, at the time this speech was addressed to them, were truly a military people; they had been compelled to fight for whatever they possessed; they

were surrounded by powerful and warlike neighbours, who viewed them with jealousy, and took every opportunity to harass and distress them; and whatever they possessed had been obtained by the sword. A people so accustomed to warfare were not, it may be supposed, much alarmed at threats of invasion, and were well prepared to repel and defeat the designs of a national and open foe.

This, however, is not our case; this country has not, within memory of the oldest inhabitant, known the evils which necessarily waste and distress the seat of war: while other nations have drunk deep of the cup of trembling, we have been secure; while disorder, plunder and rapine have made havock in other countries, we have heard the din of anarchy from afar; we have risen and laid down in peace, we have reaped the fruits of our industry in quiet, while other nations have been overwhelmed in consternation and dismay. Though we shared in common with other countries in the dearth and scarcity which so lately prevailed in Europe, we reaped the

the fruits of far distant countries; and though many of us must have felt the hard pressure of poverty and scanty seasons, few, I trust, experienced the misery of absolute and urgent want. We have hitherto, by God's assistance, baffled the designs of our enemies, we have been viewed by surrounding nations with reverence and fear, and induced some of them, by an example of steady valour, to repel, though I confess ultimately without success, the daring efforts of an insulting foe. When other people have been menaced with tyranny, invasion, and rapine, they have looked up to this country as to the beacon of a troubled world, and sought in our exertions security and peace. Peace at length we sought. But peace did we find? No! Peace brought us nothing but insult and treachery. At the very time when we were employed in drawing up articles of peace, when we were purchasing, by the cession of hard-earned conquests, long wished-for peace and fancied security, our adversaries were planning schemes of insidious perfidy, or

open war. *We looked for peace, but no good came, for a time of health, but behold trouble.*

I wish not to enter on the wide and thorny field of civil government: this is neither the time nor the place to treat of the plans of a ministry, or the politics of a state: my only aim at present is, to convince you of your danger, your duty, and your hopes. Your danger, which unless opposed with steadiness and fortitude, is alarming and inevitable: your duty, which is broad and clear: and your hopes, which, if built on a right foundation, will, I trust, be found just and sure.

Few, who think at all, will hesitate to own that our condition is alarming, and our perils great. Our enemies are active and warlike, their armies composed of veterans, and their resources infinite: their sole aim is the subjugation of this country; their whole force will be employed in this enterprise: to this is all their courage roused, to this are all their endeavours bent: if their design has been for some months deferred, it is far from being abandoned.

abandoned. We are not now, as formerly, to contend for remote possessions, to acquire or defend a distant colony, or a commercial right. Our all, our country, our very existence as a nation is at stake. In former wars, we might fear the loss of a distant fortress, or of some island, which might produce wealth to individuals, or revenue to the state. We now contend for our own island, our native soil, our property, and home. Think not that I wish to aggravate misfortune, or exaggerate the dangers which so nearly approach us; my only wish is, to impress upon your minds a lively picture of our situation, and to throw off that sluggish apathy in which some of us are immersed. Many of us are rash enough still to think, that our enemies do not really design to invade us, or that if they do, their attempts will certainly be frustrated, and that on the onset they must meet with defeat: these men will be the first to despond in the hour of danger, and will shrink from battle as they did from thought. Others there are, who through

a fond persuasion of their own courage, and that of their countrymen, wish them to land, that they may experience the valour of Englishmen, and be convinced how futile were their hopes. But these surely do not consider the confusion, that even a small force, were they to effect a landing, would create, the horrible crimes they would commit, the disorder they would introduce, the carnage that would ensue. There may be some, but I trust they are very few, and am not sure that there are any, that care not which way the scale turns; they may think that they would live as comfortably under another government, as under this; that the only difference would be, that they would then pay taxes to a foreigner, instead of their anointed king. But these people, if any there be, grossly deceive themselves; they know not the practice of these invaders, they cannot have heard, or cannot have believed, the oppression, cruelty, and exactions, which they have exercised in every country that has submitted to their yoke: wherever they have spread their banners,

banners, there have always followed havoc, rapine, and unbridled lust; and there is no country through which their armies have passed, but has drunk deep of the cup of trembling, and fallen an inglorious prey to rapacity and spoil. Alliance has not been less ruinous than hostility. Look at any nation which has been compelled to receive them as guardians, or hail them as friends. Look at Holland, look at Switzerland, look at any other land, in which they have been saluted as brethren, or admitted as allies. They have all suffered the extremity of slavery, have felt the full weight of a tyrant's, a foreign master's yoke, and have been compelled to provide, and purchase the thongs with which they have themselves been scourged.

These, and worse than these, are the evils with which we are now menaced; for it is certain, that no people are hated by them with so much rancour, for none have opposed them with so much success; none have been so true to their cause, none have fought so bravely, none have held out so long. Every calamity which

can befall a conquered people, if the threats of our enemies are carried into execution, and their attempts succeed, will fall on this nation with its utmost weight; every insult that cruelty can perpetrate, or triumphant malignity devise, will be offered to this hitherto happy country, and must be most keenly felt. What instigates them to invasion? What is their motive to attempt descent? The hope of plunder. The expectation of revenge. Revenge, which has long been rankling, and which can be satiated but by our defeat.

In such a situation, is it necessary to enquire what is our duty? What the line of conduct we ought to pursue?

There are implanted in the mind of every man certain instinctive affections, which grow up with our frame, and leave us but with our existence. Among these Patriotism holds a high rank: this generous principle is diffused through the whole human race. There is no nation so barbarous, no country so savage, no people so mean and poor, as not to entertain sentiments

sentiments of love and affection for their native soil, even to countries where it would seem nature had denied every comfort, and those governments are most tyrannical, we have seen the inhabitants attached, and ready to fight and die in defence of their country and home. How strong then should this spirit be in us, whose country is rich and powerful, who enjoy every comfort that civilized man can possess or desire, whose government is most mild, whose religion is most pure, whose constitution is the pride of its own people, and the admiration of the world!

If a man will not submit to temporary inconvenience, and the chance of battle, and of death, in defence of all that is dear and near to him, for the protection of those who cannot protect themselves, in whose society he has passed all his joyous, all his happy days, he is not worthy to enjoy domestic comfort, and is in heart a slave. There is not, perhaps, a man among us, who has not some one who looks up to him for support, for safety, for defence. Some have parents,

by whose care and fond solicitude during the helpless period of infancy they have been nurtured and kept from harm. Others have wives and children, who constitute their happiness, and whose welfare they prize, or ought to prize, as dearly as their own. Can any one look in the faces of his little ones, where he reads nought but innocence and filial love, and not feel his spirit burn within him, and his soul roused to their protection and support?

But there are other and equally cogent arguments to incite us to act with alacrity and zeal. We have not only *to play the men for our people*, but *for the cities of our God.* Never had any nation more reason to be grateful to Providence than ourselves, nor had we ever greater need of his immediate and signal help. In no country was religion ever possessed in greater purity, and, I trust I may add, taught with greater zeal. We have had every spiritual comfort we could wish, and much more than we deserve. Our ancestors suffered much to establish this purity in our religion, and frequently

defended

defended it at the expence of life. Let it not be said that we are negligent of our salvation, and *are departing away from our God.* Let us convince our enemies, who seem to suppose that we are mean enough to crouch to their tyranny, and be ranked among their slaves: let us convince them, that we are actuated by the manly spirit of our forefathers, which has so often repelled attacks, chastised their violence, and defied their power. That we still feel within us those inbred sentiments, which are the truest guardians of our liberty, the faithful and active monitors of all that is generous and free, and liberal in man: that we will preserve to our latest breath those holy institutions, those chartered rights, which are the dearest inheritance of our ancestors, in the establishment of which they cheerfully endured every hardship, and for which many of them suffered the pains of exile, and of death. We are now obliged to stand up in defence of every thing that piety holds most sacred, that freemen hold most dear. We are called upon by every principle

ciple of duty to adhere to and protect our families, our country, our sovereign, and *the cities of our God.* What we owe to our families, our own hearts will be the most ready prompters; we surely owe to our king and country the support of our persons and property; and we must well perceive, that, whatever exertions we may use for our country, whatever sacrifices we may now make for its defence and preservation, will be ultimately heaped upon ourselves, and will at length procure for us prosperity and peace. At the present moment it is doubtless our plain and urgent duty to unite with heart and hand to strengthen the lawful authority of government, and assist with dispatch and energy the measures it is compelled to use, in order to repel a formidable and insulting foe.

If we keep these objects steadily in view, if we uniformly act as honest men, and good Christians, we may indeed look up with confidence and hope.

Thank God, we are not yet bereft of hope, nor can we be, while we know we are

are in the hands of a merciful Providence. This trust in the Almighty protection must be our *anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast.* However great may be our exertions, without Him we can do nothing: and, God be praised, we have great reason to hope, that, if our efforts are vigorous, our hearts sincere, and our trust in the Almighty firm, He will protect us now, as He has ever done, and our hearts shall have cause to rejoice and overflow with gratitude to Him, who has in repeated and signal instances preserved this country from desolation and distress. We are none of us, I trust, so senseless as to imagine that God is careless of his creatures, and watches not over the children of men. We are taught, and we must believe, if we are Christians, that the hairs of our head are all numbered, that not a sparrow falls to the ground, without the immediate direction or permission of our Almighty Father: how much more are we bound to trust in his favour, and confide in his love: *we are of more value than many sparrows.* Let us not be scared

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at the hitherto good fortune of our enemies, their numbers, or their might: we know that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong: that whatever be our dangers, the Almighty can deliver us out of all; and we may surely cherish the hope, that our earnest petitions will bring down a blessing on our exertions, and that *God will bless us, and with his favour compass us, as with a shield.*

We are engaged in a righteous cause, in a war of just defence, for the support of our laws, our property, and our religion. Our enemies are lawless invaders, whose cruelty and crimes will never be washed from the memory, or tradition of men. They have sworn the subjugation of our nation; their aim is plunder, their means destruction, their resources wrung from the hands of the poor, miserable, pillaged countries, which have yielded to their arms. We fight *for our own people, and the cities of our God.* They overturn every thing sacred and honourable. Our prayers are offered up to Heaven for protection, and we humbly implore the assistance

sistance of Him, who is able to save and defend us, for *vain is the help of man.* While their religious assemblies resound with blasphemous adulation to their imperious tyrant: ours, we trust, are filled with devout petitions to our Saviour, that he would defend our country, our altars, and the pure profession of our holy faith.

But let us not deceive ourselves, nor trust in any merit of our own, or that we have any claim to expect that the scourge that has visited other nations, should not fall upon ourselves. *Suppose ye that they were sinners above all Europeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent,* except your principles be pure, except your practice accord with the professions ye have made this day in your religious assemblies, *ye shall all likewise perish:* ye shall be engulphed in as hopeless misery, as those nations, of whose consternation and overthrow ye have heard: and whose fate ye shall fare, unless ye turn from your evil ways, unless ye strive in some sort to deserve the title, as ye have long unthankfully experienced the

the benefits of the peculiar favourites of Heaven: for such certainly must be those who have been exempted from miseries, which have pervaded almost every other nation on the globe: such certainly must be those, who have so long, and so successfully, withstood the attacks of enemies, whose armies have triumphed over a prouder foe: who have so lately trampled over ensigns, which were consecrated by the respect of ages: whose moderation has been affectedly admired, while they were sweeping from the earth authorities, formidable to every other people, and rendered sacred by time; whose glory had been till now untarnished, whose dominions were fixed and extensive, whose power was equal, and whose rank was coeval, and superior to our own.

The surest ground of hope is sober reflection, and sweet is that reflection, which is not mingled with remorse. A proper view of our past conduct and future intentions will best discover our real situation. It is not an overweening confidence, it is not refusal of thought, or rejection

of alarm, that will effect our security, diminish our danger, or stave off our fear. It is a scrutiny of ourselves, it is a proper reliance on our Saviour, it is the united exertion of piety and vigour, that can alone deliver us. It is not a comparison of our local advantages with those of other states; but a comparison of what we have, and might have, done; of what we are, and ought to be, that can at all avail us now. Though our religion has been professed, perhaps, in greater purity, have our crimes been less? Have we been thankful for the many peculiar blessings we have enjoyed, and owned with heartfelt gratitude; that the bounty of our heavenly Father is infinite, and undeserved? Or have we considered his blessings as indifferent, or as things of course? If this be the case, if we have stupidly slighted the blessings of Heaven, or unthankfully received them: our threatened punishment must be confessed to be well merited, and our correction just. I am unwilling to press this matter too close, lest we sink into despondency. We know we have all offended,

fended, have all deserved the severity of God's wrath. Let us, therefore, most humbly implore pardon for our offences, and by hearty repentance of what is past, render ourselves more deserving of future blessings; so shall we face danger with greater bravery, and go forward to meet our national enemy, in the sure confidence, that if we fall, we fall in a good cause, respected by our country, and at peace with our God.

SERMON

SERMON XII.

ON PERVERSENESS.

ST. LUKE xvi. 31.

If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

IT will be at once perceived that these words are the conclusion of a most impressive and interesting parable, delivered by our Saviour to his disciples: in which he points out to them the certainty and justice of future rewards and punishments, and warns them in the most urgent manner to take heed lest *they also come into a place of* future *torment*. It is not my intention to enter fully into the circumstances of the parable, or detain you with a laboured explanation of it; the parable itself, and

its application, must be familiar to the recollection of every one who hears me: I am only solicitous, at present, to call your attention to the verse more immediately under review. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*

Never had any people more reason to believe and obey the great Creator of the universe, than those to whom this parable was addressed; never was there a time when they had greater reason to expect their long-hoped for Messiah: but never were they, perhaps, more unfit to receive the doctrines he taught, or to credit the character he assumed. Every doctrine of their religion, every precept of their law, every object which presented itself to the eyes of this people, forcibly recalled to their minds the wonderful instances of the favour and protection of God, of his prophecies, and promises of future blessings. It was their greatest pride that they were confessedly the favoured people of God, and though for their multiplied crimes and horrid impieties, he had repeatedly

peatedly withdrawn his assistance; yet he never left them without assurance of his protection and paternal care.

It may not be uninteresting, or uninstructive, to enquire, why this people, who all, at this time, anxiously expected their Messiah, whose advent was foretold by prophecies most plain, and which too they regarded as sacred and authentic; why they rejected, and contemned him, after the many astonishing miracles he wrought in proof of his divine mission, and the unanswerable evidence, that he *was indeed the Son of God.* His whole conversation tended to instruct them, to ameliorate and soften their dispositions, to incite them to deeds of beneficence and love: his conduct and habits of life were such as to impress every one, who knew him, with sentiments of reverence for his character, and affection for his person: all his discourses were directed to promote peace and good-will to men, and whatever transactions he had with others were always intended for their good, and con-

stantly produced it. Why then, why did they refuse to believe him?

Because his precepts were opposite to their prejudices; because they did not understand the doctrines he taught; because they were dissonant to those lofty expectations, which they had vainly conceived of their nation, and of their own worth; because he preached to them the insufficiency of animal sacrifices, and the rites of the temple worship; and demanded from them, not the firstlings of their flocks, nor the payment of mint and cummin, but the pure and simple offerings of genuine devotion and a contrite heart.

The Jews affirmed, and most of them believed, that they obeyed the laws of Moses with sincerity, and observed with great strictness the ordinances of their lawgiver. They did, indeed, observe with scrupulous exactness the ceremonial part of their religion, but were utter strangers to true piety. Their law was given to separate them from all other nations, and their ceremonies ordained

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and defined, that they should not mix with the worship of the true God the idolatrous rites of the nations by whom they were surrounded. The ceremonies established by God himself, they, it must be owned, religiously observed, and from the time of the Babylonish captivity to the advent of Christ kept them all pure and unviolated. But these ceremonies alone were never meant to constitute the whole, or the greater part of religious worship; the seat of religion is the heart, it is there that piety resides, and influences the opinions and the conduct of men. Most of the Jewish ceremonies were merely types of future blessings, *the sacrifices that were offered year by year continually could not make the comers thereunto perfect:* they were, indeed, necessary to keep alive in the hearts of the people, the necessity of an atonement for their crimes, but could never of themselves procure the salvation, or expiate the sins of their offerers.

The same prophets who exhorted them to preserve the law of Moses whole and

without variation, also preached most earnestly the necessity of a good and pious life. But their exhortations to piety and godliness of life were not, it seems, so well received, or so generally kept as the ceremonies they enjoined. They were opposite to the pride and self-righteousness, which were the prominent features of the Jewish character: for this people, it appears, would rather be subject to a perpetual round of rites, than be at the pains of purifying their minds; they had the most convincing proofs, that the men who exhorted them to holiness, were *teachers sent from God*, and were well assured that their doctrine was holy, just, and true, but these humble means of obtaining the favour of God were too grating to their stubborn dispositions; and whatever evidence a prophet might exhibit, that he was commissioned by the Almighty to instruct, to reform, and to save them, yet if he contradicted their vicious propensities, or required a renewal of heart, and genuine repentance, he was at once deserted and despised. Moses

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and the prophets had done every thing that persuasion, punishment, and exhortation, could do, to turn them from their evil ways, and lead them into the paths of piety and virtue: they had confirmed their authority and doctrine by the most astonishing display of divine power and assistance, but their precepts, with regard to morality and virtue, were disregarded and unheard. The rich man in the parable is not accused of any violation of the law, or of his religion as professed by the Jews; he was, probably, strictly observant of the traditions of his fathers, and was esteemed, perhaps, among his cotemporaries, a worthy and good man; but whatever might have been his outward behaviour, his observance of the forms of worship, he was miserably deficient in the essentials of religion: his heart did not glow with that charity and love of his neighbour which is the life and soul of all religion; which was warmly inculcated by the law he professed to observe, and which has been since still more strongly enforced in the Gospel.

Neither was he absolutely destitute of natural affection, for though he could behold the wretched Lazarus at his gate hungry and full of sores, without pity, or a wish to relieve him, probably because such sights were familiar to him, yet he was solicitous that his brethren should be exhorted to a good and holy life, by arguments more convincing, than those, to which he had refused to listen, and besought Abraham to send a messenger from the dead, to preach to them of their evil ways, that they might be converted and live. But Abraham told him they had every inducement to virtue, that man could receive, or God would offer; *they have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

If we turn our eyes from the state of the Jews to other nations, from the times of our Saviour to our own, we shall readily perceive the justice of Abraham's remark, and have occasion to lament most feelingly, that we are as criminal, if not more

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so, than the Jews themselves. We have all the inducements to believe and obey the ordinances of God, which were offered to them, and a much more eloquent preacher than Moses, or the prophets, to warn us of our danger, and assure us upon our repentance of pardon and peace. We have been bought and redeemed from sin and misery, if we will accept so great salvation, by the death and sufferings of the Son of God. We have not to wade through an useless round of ceremonial observances, but have only to keep ourselves pure and pious; and are assured that through the merits of Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, our sins will be forgiven us, and we shall be received into those mansions of eternal happiness which Christ has purchased for us. We are all ready enough to condemn the Jews for rejecting their Messiah, and for refusing to believe and obey the doctrines he taught, and the precepts he enjoined; we consider them as bigotted, perverse, and obstinate, as deafened by prejudice, and blinded by sin; but seldom compare

compare their opinions and practice with our own; we think them most criminal in rejecting the offers of redemption, in their attachment to the traditions of men, rather than the commands of their God; we think them most perverse, in refusing to credit the divine mission of our Saviour, though *he had done so many miracles before them;* and most guilty and cruel, in causing him to suffer a shameful and agonising death. Upon consideration it will, perhaps, be found, that we ourselves are not entirely free from any of their crimes. Those who reject the Gospel, or those who refuse to regulate their lives by the precepts it prescribes, are surely as criminal as those who *would not hear Moses and the Prophets:* for we in these later ages have still more ample testimony of the truth of the Holy Scriptures, more ready means of instruction, and a fuller completion of the prophecies, to assure us of their authenticity, and confirm us in the faith. To convince us of the certainty of a future judgment, and a resurrection to come, One *has risen* from the dead;

dead; has given the strongest possible proof that our souls and bodies shall reunite, and reap the fruits of our faith and righteousness, or suffer the penalties we have deserved. No other exhortation can be expected, for none more forcible can be offered: no farther proof will be added, for none more convincing can be adduced. In compassion to the weakness of man, and even in condescension to his prejudices, God Incarnate explained his own laws; and by a voluntary humiliation, bore our sins for us, and redeemed us from the necessary consequences of a corrupt and sinful nature.

If then there be any who *will not be persuaded though one rose from the dead*, if they will reject the most pressing assurances of the divine nature and doctrine of our Saviour: what punishment, think you, they deserve? What will they receive? We are assured that the rewards and punishments of the next world will be infinite and endless; how great then is the necessity of securing the one, and of averting the other. But these punishments

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are not denounced on those only, who obstinately refuse to believe the divine mission of Christ, who impiously despise his counsels, and set at nought his commands; but on those also, who profess to believe every truth of our holy religion, but whose lives and practice are contrary to their profession. It would seem incredible, were there not instances of it most glaring and frequent, that any one, who sincerely believes the Gospel, should be guilty of sins which it expressly forbids, and on the indulgence of which it pronounces most severe and endless punishment. But so fascinating is vice, so strong our passions, or so weak our faith, that though men profess, and, perhaps too, persuade themselves, that their belief in the Gospel is steady and sincere; they do not suffer themselves to be at all influenced by the motives to piety which it so strongly holds up.

Too many of us suppose, if we be not guilty of any flagrant crime, or are the slaves of vicious habits, that all is well, and that God expects, and can fairly claim

claim no more; they are too apt to say within themselves, "Whom have I injured? Of what have I been guilty? "*Whose ox have I stolen? Or whom have I* "*defrauded?* My life is regular, and my "morals pure, why then may I not expect "reward, why not claim the blessings "reserved for the righteous?" The answer is obvious. How have you deserved them? If you are a sincere Christian, you must confess them to have been purchased by the death and merits of Jesus Christ. Have you been his faithful servant? Have you been at all times thankful for your redemption, and delighted to think of his love? Have you always made his service your pride and pleasure, and never, through fear of reproach or ridicule, hesitated to confess his power, and reverence his name? Amidst all your transactions with the world, nay, even amidst your devotional exercises, have you never suffered worldly thoughts to intrude, and take off your affections from your Saviour and your God? No, not one among us will be so rash and daring, however virtuous may have

have been his life, however chaste his principles, no one dares declare that he deserves eternal recompence; happy shall we be if we escape eternal punishment! The lives of the most innocent among us, were they weighed in the scales of truth and rigid justice, would be found sinful and corrupt; and it is only by the free grace of God, and through the merits of Jesus Christ, that we can hope for pardon of the many sins, which however we may now conceal from the world, and even from ourselves, would, if divine justice were not tempered with a Redeemer's love, be sufficient to drag us down to endless misery and deserved disgrace. But thanks be to God, his justice is tempered with mercy, and we have full assurance that if our endeavours after purity be hearty, if our faith in Christ be steady and sincere, our sins will be blotted out by Him who *has risen from the dead*, and who invites every repentant sinner to *return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.*

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

ON THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL.

Acts xix. 20.

So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

THIS remark naturally flowed from the pen of the sacred writer, while he was recording the amazing increase and eager reception of that religion, whose founder had been so recently executed, whose votaries had been dispersed, and whose very name was supposed to have been crushed and annihilated. Independent of the proofs of our religion which are afforded by the completion of the prophecies relating to the birth, person, and character of the Messiah; independent of the wonderful miracles and holiness of our Lord himself, sufficient evidence of its truth and divine authority may be collected

collected from its success and prevalence: and few arguments can be adduced more strong and convincing than those which are drawn from its early growth and rapid propagation. For although we must ever be careful to distinguish successful error from simple truth, although prosperity can never justify deceit, nor success sanctify imposture, yet the circumstances which attended the publication and progress of Christianity, are so singular and remarkable, that no one, who considers them with candour and attention, will scruple to own, that its preachers were incited and supported by authority from Heaven; that no man, or set of men, could have overcome the obstacles by which the apostles were opposed, unless the Almighty had protected their cause, unless the *Lord had worked with them, and confirmed the word with signs following.*

It must be confessed, that the common, or universal prevalence of any sect or opinion, though a strong argument in its favour, is not of itself sufficient to establish its truth. The affairs of this world

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are so conducted, that the most vicious men often enjoy the best fortune, and the most extravagant tenets often receive most support from a depraved and corrupted community. We are naturally inclined to credit that which promises much, and has been proved to have been successful. Pleasure, interest, and ambition, are powerful advocates; and when they unite to teach any doctrine adorned by novelty, and adapted to the common propensities of nature, it is no wonder that men are persuaded to follow that which is so well recommended. But the Gospel had no such support, all the power, all the learning, the prejudices, the interest, the inclinations of mankind were adverse to its cause, and employed in its extirpation: its preachers were illiterate, poor, and every where despised, its doctrines were opposite to the passions, the received maxims, and the dispositions of men; its principles were vilified as a new and pernicious superstition, as destructive of social order and established law, and its votaries as seditious, disaffected to legal govern-

ment, disturbers alike of private happiness and the public peace.

The account of the first preaching of Christianity after the ascension of our Saviour as given in the Acts of the Apostles, is so simple, so clear, and every way convincing of the truth of their cause, and the sanctity of their characters, that it at once commands our attention by its importance, and charms by its simplicity. The sacred writer has given us a brief and plain account of the early progress and reception of our religion, and though the matter be complex, and the events various and multiplied, the story is neither crowded by circumstantial and redundant detail, nor weakened by an abridged and hurried relation. He sets forth in true and glowing colours the perverseness of the Jew, and the ignorance of the Gentile, he clearly discovers to us that Christianity had to wade through difficulties, which could neither be surmounted by patience, nor overcome by human ability: besides the obstacles which were raised by the vices and corruption of the world, it had to subdue

subdue scorn, and awaken indifference, till at length penetrating the mists of prejudice and error, it warmed the hearts of the sensible, and illumined the understanding of the learned.

The cause of the Gospel had no fortunate events to further its propagation, no adventitious aids to support its truth. It made its way by its own intrinsic excellence, through the most powerful opposition which the craft and authority of man could devise or execute, or the gates of Hell advance. It was only requisite that it should be understood to be believed, and when believed, it was found to be an inexhaustible spring of comfort in every change of fortune, and the most pressing exigencies of distress. For three centuries after its publication, it was uniformly followed by affliction, the early Christians were marked objects of obloquy, and were ever regarded with detestation and contempt; they rested their cause on circumstances which appeared absurd and unnatural; and their virtues had nothing of that dazzling brilliancy which captivates

the senses of the multitude, and which so often irresistibly commands respect. The Gospel not only did not excite men to the perpetration of actions which were universally considered as great and illustrious, but condemned them: it repelled the proudest boast of the Pagan, and chastised that loftiness of spirit, that admired and fiery arrogance which has often raised the hero through scenes of surrounding calamity, and which is built on the domination and the misery of man. It resisted all sentiments and aims of superiority over beings who have been created by the same Lord, whose souls have been ransomed from endless misery by the same Redeemer, and been bought at the same price. It rejected all pre-eminence but that of virtue, its mild and charitable spirit was far from teaching that revenge could ever be considered as a ground of commendation, or cruelty as the parent of renown. The qualities and sentiments required of a sincere Christian are diametrically opposite to the virtues most commended by the ancients, and if we

we may judge by the general subjects of applause, most congenial to the human heart. Intrepidity, implacable resentment, vindictive and ferocious hatred, are among the virtues most celebrated by the best authors of antiquity, and which even now frequently inspire esteem, when characters which have been produced by them are listened to in narration, or represented in our sight. Toil and unremitted perseverance in the pursuit of a criminal passion, or danger in the acquisition of wealth, almost always excite sentiments of praise even from those who profess themselves the disciples of him, who was meek and lowly, and who taught that gentleness, patience, and forgiveness, are the genuine offspring of his religion, and the brightest gems in the Christian's crown.

In the interval between the crucifixion of our Lord, and the day of Pentecost, the disciples shewed no indications of that resolution, zeal, and undaunted fortitude, which distinguished their characters during their subsequent preaching and dis-

tress. They all seem to have been of a meek and simple temper, and the most unlikely of all men to have entered into a combination to deceive. Their personal courage was questionable, even St. Peter, who was always most forward in the cause of Christ, felt such alarm at being discovered as his companion and pretended accomplice, that the question of a servant maid induced him to disown that holy and beneficent master whom he had promised he would die with, rather than deny. And after the resurrection of our Saviour, when, it might have been supposed, their spirits would be enlivened, and their hopes animated by his promised return to life; when cruelty had exhausted its power, when in proof of the divinity of our Lord, the grave had abandoned its victory, and death been deprived of its sting. Even at this glorious evidence of the authority and divine character of Christ, the disciples were still alarmed, and *assembled in secret*. The change, which was exhibited in their minds and conduct afterwards, must then have been effected by

by a supernatural power, by means as mighty, as they were extraordinary. For no one by the mere force of reason, by a sudden effort of courage or resolution, or by any of the powers of the mind, no one has ever been known to drive away, or overcome, the apprehension of death and torture, and so soon evince fortitude which surpassed the powers or the imagination of man. To pursue a line of conduct which would certainly lead to disgrace and misery, without any expectation of reward, or assurance of protection, argues the wildest insanity; a single attempt of this nature, without any acknowledged or visible inducement, would have warranted the conclusion of the Jews at the day of Pentecost, that the Apostles were all of them bereft of their senses, or were *full of new wine.*

For a long time previous to the advent of Christ, the power of miracles had ceased, and the voice of prophecy had been dumb. From the death of Malachi to the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias, the favoured people of God

had waited in awful and anxious expectation for the accomplishment of the prophecies, which were big with their future fate, and which all acknowledged to be divine. None had been blessed or gratified with any extraordinary communication from the Almighty. The miracles of our Saviour, therefore, and his apostles, must have been most striking, and by frequency could have lost none of their weight. Their nature, their circumstances, and tendency, were sufficient to have convinced any whose hearts were not callous to every persuasion or argument, which the mind of man can feel, or the Almighty has ever vouchsafed to apply. So convincing, so beneficent, and extraordinary, were the miracles which were wrought by our Saviour, that the most wary and confirmed hostility, the most vigilant circumspection could neither deny their efficacy nor their truth. His opposers, therefore, and these consisted of the wisest and most respected of the Jewish people, were compelled to attack the power by which they were affected; and, by a most impious, as well

well as absurd accusation, affirmed that the most striking miracles, the most transcendant instances of the power and mercy of God were wrought by the Prince of Darkness: those stupendous acts of goodness by which disease was chaced from the couch of the impotent, by which Satan was deprived of his power, and Death of his prey. This wretched subterfuge of attributing to an evil being the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, was employed by the enemies of our faith to defeat the influence, and impair the credit of the miracles, which the apostles were enabled to perform by the power and in the name of Christ, as it had been before against those, which were wrought by his own Almighty word.

There is little need of argument or consideration to shew or perceive, that the miracles which the apostles were enabled to execute, were benevolent in their tendency, and in their nature divine: they sufficiently established their character, and irrefragably confirmed the assertion, that their commission and authority proceeded from

from Heaven, and that they were done *in demonstration of the spirit and power of God.* Their miracles, though sometimes momentarily effected, were at all times open to examination, and permanently felt: they consisted not in a sudden and transitory effect on the senses, but extended to the perfect cure of complaints of long standing, restored the form of the distorted, and healed the infirmity of the sick: they cured diseases which were coeval with the birth of the patient, they caused the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, and the blind to see. They required no force of fancy to make them believed, no favourable circumstance, no happy coincidence, to render them effectual, or to forward their success. The astonishing effects of the name of Jesus of Nazareth are without parallel in history, and exceed the imagination as much as they surpass the ability of man. They were not confined to the restoration of health from disease, or from bodily or natural infirmity, the very elements confessed the authority of their Maker,

Maker, and submitted to the power of their God.

Among the miracles which formed the evidence of the truth of Christianity in the early periods of its publication, we must not pass over the amazing fortitude and supernatural patience which an innumerable multitude of martyrs displayed in the midst of sufferings that the most refined malice could invent, and which wearied the cruelty of those who felt a pride in searching out and applying new instruments of torture, in exciting more acute sensibility of anguish, and a larger variety of pain. Unassisted humanity could not have endured such agonies amidst the insults and mockery of enemies, but must have unavoidably sunk under the pressure, and have gladly caught at any means of deliverance, especially when deliverance might often, if not always, have been obtained by a slight mental reservation, or a seeming compliance with usages, which many of them had themselves been brought up to reverence, and which would have procured not only immediate

mediate rescue from death and torture, but the support of the magistrate, the favour of the powerful, and the approbation of the crowd. We do, indeed, read, and are convinced of instances of fortitude and intrepidity, that have attended the deaths of savages, that excite the wonder of the civilized, and the admiration of the brave. The original inhabitants of the other hemisphere have been known to display such stubborn patience, and invincible constancy under tortures, which, probably, equal those under which the martyrs expired, that a consideration of them may, perhaps, tend to weaken the impression, that the relation of the deaths of these holy men would otherwise make, and may seem to overthrow the assertion, that the early Christians could not have displayed such constancy, unless they had been supported by the interposition and the power of God. But this objection will disappear when we bear in mind the different circumstances and feelings under which the savage expires in America, and those that led to and accompanied the Christian's

Christian's death. The former is employed to the last in contending with his enemies, and glories as much in enduring torments with constancy, as their revenge is gratified by inflicting them. The martyrdom of the primitive Christians was attended with every addition of disgrace and insult, their sufferings were heightened by mockery, their patience regarded as pusillanimity, their names were classed with those of the vilest malefactors, and if remembered were the objects of scorn.

A more permanent, if not a stronger, operative cause of the rapid progress which attended the preaching of the Gospel, may be traced to the purity of the manners of the early Christians, and the innocence of their lives. It was contrary to sense and experience that men should endeavour to propagate imposture by means which could raise them to no earthly eminence, which did not elevate their character, nor promise them renown. Their virtues were not of a glittering nature, they broke not out in sudden temporary gleams, but shone with steady lustre,

lustre, as well amidst the gloom of distress, as the admiration of the multitude, or in the performance of a miracle. So irresistible is the force of truth, so clear and convincing is the uniform, yet not ostentatious, exhibition of virtue, that the enemies of Christianity could not withhold admiration, and were prompted to investigate the cause of that change of habit and opinion so opposite to their mode of education, or the usages of the world. The prominent features of their conduct and character did not betray the appearance of guilt. Their actions could not be imputed to improper motives. To what could they attribute their meekness, their indifference to personal advantage, but to the little value they set on this world, and their disregard to things temporal in comparison to things eternal? How could they otherwise account for that charity and universal benevolence which characterized their words and actions, but to a constant attention to the precepts, and a strict observance of the example of him who *died for all, that they which*

which live should not henceforth live for themselves, but unto him which died for them. In searching after the springs and motives of the conduct of the early Christians, it was soon discovered that though their portion was distress and persecution in this world, they were not without comfort; nor were their lives passed in perpetual mortification: it was soon perceived, that religion afforded joys, to which the proud and faithless must ever be strangers, that enjoyment consisted not in the indulgence of passion, in the riot of sensuality, or in luxurious ease. The heart of the sincere Christian was ever calm and unruffled, was often the seat of the purest delight, and never the abode of mental misery and pain. *It contained a treasure which neither moth nor rust could corrupt, and through which no thieves could break nor steal.* The happiness of the gayest is faint, and aims of the most ambitious are mean, compared with the hopes of him whose prospects are immortal, whose wishes are built on the promises of his Saviour, and whose life is regulated by the law of his God.

During

During the persecution which the early disciples of Christ underwent in the publication of the Gospel, they were continually animating and supporting each other with the tradition and memory of the example of our Saviour and his apostles: every circumstance of their lives, as well as the patient firmness displayed at their deaths, afforded ample matter of discourse, was cherished with earnest solicitude, and remembered with veneration. Ignorant how soon, or by what way they should depart out of this world, their first concern, and principal occupation, was a preparation for the next. Hence the sanctity of their lives, hence those lively expressions of faith and religious confidence which break out continually in the writings of the primitive Fathers, hence the purity of their manners, and hence too the success of their preaching, and the rapid propagation of the Gospel.

How differently are the professors of Christianity in the present day affected by the perusal and the knowledge of the great truths of the Gospel. How cold and

and inanimate are the emotions which are produced by considering, if indeed they can be brought to consider, the death of Christ, and the preaching of his apostles? How faint are the impressions which religion makes on the practice or opinions of men? How dissimilar to that love of God which is declared to be the first and great commandment, and which gave birth to such noble instances of magnanimity in the primitive Christians? How apt, how forward are we to complain, if called upon to perform any duty which requires the least abasement or self-denial, or even to abstain from positive guilt, or the gratification of a criminal wish or appetite? If our holy faith was planted in a soil enriched with the blood of martyrs, if such excellent virtues were exhibited in the conduct and character of its first preachers, if no less a sacrifice than the Son of God himself was required to redeem our souls, and purchase for us eternal rest and glory: it must surely be our urgent duty to manifest our fidelity and gratitude by prompt obedience, and

earnest and hearty devotion. Utterly dead must he be to every impulse of sensibility, to every noble faculty of the mind, to every good or natural affection; who can contemplate with indifference, or hear with unaltered composure, the unspeakable mercies of Christ; who, when he thinks on his Redeemer, does not feel faith, hope, and charity, spring up within him; who does not fervently pray that the Gospel may be soon universally extended, that *the sound of it may go out into all lands, and the words of it unto the ends of the world.*

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

ON CONTENTMENT *.

Acts vi. 1.

And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

To understand clearly this, and many other passages of scripture, it is necessary to compare them with other parts of sacred history, and to consider the particular circumstances of those whose state and condition it concerns. We read that *there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.* Who these Grecians were, it is of little importance to enquire; whether be meant those Jews who, after

* Preached at the annual distribution of charity money.

the dispersion of the ten tribes, lived among and spake the language of the Greeks, or whether they were Gentiles by descent, and after having become proselytes to Judaism, had embraced Christianity, and were, therefore, termed Grecians, to distinguish them from those who boasted of their descent from Abraham: it is sufficient for us to know, that they were received as members of the Christian church, and became entitled to every privilege, which that religion bestows equally on all its sincere and faithful votaries.

In this early stage of the religion of our Saviour, when its doctrines were as yet new, and made more impression on the minds and lives of its disciples, than, it is lamentable to own, it has ever since been known to do in after times; the condition of their poorer brethren was matter of serious concern to the rich, and fully aware of the inestimable value of the blessings of a future existence, they made no scruple of parting with their temporal possessions; and were willing to submit

submit to every inconvenience to which penury is exposed in this world, to be deemed worthy of partaking of the rewards, which Christ has promised to the meek and charitable in the next.

But whatever influence the precepts of the Gospel may have had on the temper and the practice of its professors, it cannot, or it does not, at once divest them of those prejudices which have ever been found more inveterate and difficult to eradicate, or overcome, than occasional, or even habitual vice. Almost every man is too apt to consider his own happiness as abridged by the superior or equal happiness of his neighbour, and to be unwilling to admit others to privileges, which he has been taught to consider as peculiar to his nation or himself. *The widows of the Grecians were neglected in the daily ministration:* it was, indeed, a prepossession most dear to every individual of the Jewish nation, that they themselves were the peculiar and the only favourites of Heaven, and had a right to expect, and to claim blessings from the Almighty,

of which the rest of mankind, *to whom the promises were never made*, were unworthy and exempt.

This exemption was openly avowed by every descendant of Israel before the promulgation of the Gospel, and was the last and narrowest national prejudice which the Jewish disciples of Christ were persuaded to give up. When, therefore, the alms and possessions of the first Christian societies were distributed, the Jewish Christians, who were by far more numerous than their Grecian brethren, and to whom, it is probable, the office of ministration was confined, evinced much and marked partiality, and by an unequal partition of the necessary provisions, discovered that they thought themselves superior to the rest.

This explanation of the temper and opinions of the Judaising Christians will serve to account for their claims of superiority, and the dissention which thus unhappily disturbed the peace of the first Christian community, will by thus considering the circumstances of its members,

more powerfully excite our lamentation than surprise. In the review of the sentiments of the primitive Christians, we discern with painful reluctance the vestiges and effects of those passions, which it was the professed object of the author of Christianity to extirpate, and which all his disciples at their baptism are bound to renounce. In the infancy of the church every member, we are told, abandoned his private property, and readily surrendered his share of temporal possessions for the use of the community: *they had all things common.* Although this practice certainly was laudable, and highly useful in a confined and infant society, we find no precept or warrant for its use and imitation in the doctrine of our Saviour, whose knowledge of the world, and of human nature, was too clear and perfect, to allow him to enjoin or to approve an absolute equality of the riches of the earth: an equal participation of property he well knew was impracticable, and tends directly to break up the basis on which civil society rests: and we perceive by

this early account of the first believers, that a common division of the conveniences, or, perhaps, merely of the necessaries of life, occasioned a dissention even amongst those who had abandoned every hope of temporal grandeur, and surrendered their whole property for the use of the community and the public good.

But though an equality of property be not expedient or possible, it by no means follows that there should not be an equality of happiness in the earth. Every station of life has comforts which are peculiarly its own; the shattered roof, which partially shelters its humble inhabitant, secures him more effectually from malice and envy, than the proud and lofty turrets of the rich. If his pleasures are more circumscribed, his cares also and his wants are less. The injunctions and promises of the Gospel afford him comfort and consolation, while in the rich and sensual they cannot fail to excite sentiments of remorse and apprehension, which must embitter the luxuries they at present taste, and

and of the future must poison the hope. For the consolations of religion are offered to those only whose dispositions in this world are humble, and whose lives are pure: the thoughts of another life to him, who is pampered with the good things of this, must threaten rather than console. He, whose life and age have been passed in giddy sensuality, is surely rather an object of compassion, than of envy, and his last end must be contemplated with mingled pity and contempt. Even in this world his condition is far from being desirable, for he, who is idle in a constant round of dissipation, will be poor in the midst of wealth. When temporal pleasure is perpetual, it necessarily becomes insipid; fatigued with the repetition of the same amusements, the votary of intemperance must often feel disgust, when the night is passed in riot, the day is spent in trouble, and the repose which cheers and recruits the spirits of the wearied labourer, often refuses to visit the couch of the gay and wealthy voluptualist.

On

On occasions like the present, we must all of us, I trust, feel grateful for the happy influence of the Gospel on the dispositions of those who, not content with deeds of charity in their own generation, have considered the condition of the poor and needy, when their characters, and, perhaps, their names, must have long since sunk from the memory, and it may be from the tradition of men. Of the person whose bequest has invited the present congregation to assemble themselves before God, and to celebrate his praise, I can, indeed, say little, none of us being able to remember his person or his circumstances, but of the disposition of his heart we can all form a judgment, from the benevolent use to which his property was applied: upwards of a century has now elapsed when the poor and friendless first met together in this place to be relieved by his posthumous bounty, and to excite each other to deeds of benevolence and good will, by the participation of a gift, which however scanty it may appear in these days of expence and luxury, was,

in

in the age in which it was bestowed, enough to cheer the mind of the indigent, and *make glad the heart of man.* No sentiment can be so proper, surely none can so naturally arise and be cherished at this time than gratitude to our common and Almighty benefactor, who disposes the hearts of the pious to the relief of their poorer brethren: who is the author and finisher of every good and righteous affection, and who would, if we would follow his gracious direction, at all times lead us on to sentiments and deeds of charity and love.

The murmuring which arose of the Grecians against the Hebrews certainly was harmless, and trivial compared with those which are in our times so frequently excited by a greediness of wealth: and the slight intimation of the early disputes of the primitive Christians may afford us a lesson of moderation, and teach us to check those passions which may be truly considered as the parents of crimes, which have been the bane of social happiness, and have most frequently and powerfully disturbed

disturbed the peace of the world. Avarice, selfishness, and pride, are the most active disturbers of private as well as public tranquillity, and are the most common and frequent errors into which human nature can fall. They are those too which are most opposite to the spirit of Christianity, from which our Saviour in his simple and sublime Sermon on the Mount most earnestly warns his disciples, and on which the threats of Omnipotence are expressly denounced.

Let not then the man in humble life any longer complain of his condition, or murmur that he is *neglected in the daily ministration of Providence:* even in this world he is, probably, much happier than those who *put their trust in their goods, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches:* he may be well assured that contentment is not only a strict and positive duty, but the purest comfort, which is seldom enjoyed by the rich, and never by the powerful. And when it shall happen that his poverty is relieved by public charity or private beneficence, he ought

ought surely to congratulate himself on being born in a country where acts of charity are more common, and where the doctrines of the Gospel are better understood and practised, than we may exultingly and gratefully affirm is the case in any other nation on the earth. Above all, should give unfeigned thanks to his Almighty and unwearied Benefactor whose goodness is the *sole strength of our heart*, and which we trust through the merits of Christ will be *our portion for ever*.

SERMON

SERMON XV.

ON INDIFFERENCE.

St. Luke, vii. part of 32d verse.

We have piped to you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.

IT is an excellence peculiar to the writings of the New Testament, that they unite the perspicuity of biographical narration with the force and energy of eloquence; they afford the brightest example, and the clearest precepts of virtue: the plan on which they are written admits of the bold imagery and vivid colouring which distinguish the ablest authors of antiquity, while it adheres to the plain and uniform system of narrative and truth. The figures used to elucidate the doctrines of the Gospel are at once easy and elegant; and though they may sometimes rise beyond the imagination of every writer that

that has preceded or followed their publication, they never soar above the comprehension of the most illiterate Christian, or the humblest capacity. The allusions employed by our Saviour are so striking, that they cannot fail to obtain admiration; and yet so familiar as, at the same time, to excite our affection, and captivate the heart.

The propriety of this remark is abundantly exemplified in the words of the text, where by an apt and beautiful similitude, our Lord compares the Jews, whose infatuated perverseness counteracted every method employed by the Almighty to instruct and to save them, to children sitting in the market-place, and complaining to their companions, whose froward and stubborn tempers no fondness could conciliate, no condescension engage; *We have piped to you*, say they, *and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.*

The particular occasion that drew this severe rebuke from our Saviour was a message from John the Baptist, to enquire whether

whether he were indeed the Messiah they expected, and whose immediate advent he foretold: and this he did, it should seem, more to gratify the pious curiosity of his followers, than to satisfy any doubts or suspicions of his own. He knew that Christ was indeed come, the kingdom of Heaven already published, and took this method to convince his disciples, that himself was not the true Messiah, which it seems some of them fondly imagined, but sent them to Jesus, that they might be sure from a display of his superior power, and astonishing miracles, that He *was indeed that prophet that should come into the world.*

Our Saviour applied the comparison in the text to those who perversely rejected the preaching of John, because his doctrines were discordant to their early prepossessions and criminal attachments, because he led a life of severe self-denial, and preached the necessity of repentance and a godly life, and who represented him as a wild enthusiast, or as in the language of scripture "possessed with a devil:" and

who yet, when our Lord himself mixed with the habits and conversation of the world, and partook of the innocent enjoyments bestowed upon us by our Creator for our comfort and happiness; because he went to marriage feasts, and let no opportunity escape him of instructing the Jews in the great truths of the Gospel, whether of mourning or of joy, at a funeral or a feast; declared him to be *a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber.*

The precepts of John were severe and rigorous, he himself set them the example of penitentiary discipline, and led the life of a recluse. The life and conversation of our Saviour were more agreeable to the habits and manners of society: he taught them, that external appearance of repentance was of no avail, while the mind remained polluted; that the most rigid habits of mortification were less gratifying to God, than a meek and patient temper, and a contrite heart.

From such a doctrine, so mortifying to the pride, and opposite to the expectations of the Jewish people, they turned aside

with incredulity and disgust. " If," said they, " He be indeed the Messiah, the " Son of the blessed, let him exhibit " some token worthy of his high preten- " sions, and our own hopes: let him " display the banner of Omnipotence, " and expel from our hitherto favoured " country the Romans who now hold us " in subjection; let him raise again our " military character, and deliver us from " a foreign yoke. Instead of attempting " to free us from the tribute and exactions " of our Gentile masters, he associates " with their officers, and strives by per- " suasion and mild deportment to render " them his disciples, and win them to his " cause. Far different are the expecta- " tions we have been taught to form of " our true and long hoped-for Messiah; " his reign, we are convinced, will be " triumphant, his aspect imperious, under " him we shall take ample vengeance on " our enemies, and establish an universal " empire upon earth. By becoming the " disciples of Jesus, we shall attain no " personal glory, nor exalt our national

" character: he does not even teach us " to look up to him as the founder of a " mighty kingdom, as we trust he will " be, whose character and office he would " assume: his manners and doctrine are " totally dissimilar to what we expect " from him, who should redeem Israel, " and raise Jerusalem to the rank of " metropolis, and mistress of the world. " Where is that regal port, that towering " majesty, which should characterise our " expected deliverer? Where, that lust " of dominion that marks a conqueror? " Where, that aptness to command that " bespeaks a king? The conduct of Jesus " is calculated rather to conciliate favour, " than demand obedience; to convince " us by persuasion, than awe us by " superior sway."

Possessed of these notions of the temporal grandeur and authority of their Messiah, it is not surprising that the Jews discredited and despised the meek and humble Jesus, who preached the Gospel of peace, and taught, that deeds of charity, and dispositions of benevolence, were

were more acceptable in the sight of their Heavenly Father, than the proudest acts of victory, or the most signal triumphs over those Gentiles, whom they had always considered as vile and infamous, but who were now to be regarded with affection and fraternal love. Even when they fought under the immediate direction of Providence, when their battles were conducted, and success secured, by the visible interposition of the Almighty, they betrayed evident and avowed symptoms of rebellion and discontent. When led by the divine influence forty years through the wilderness, fed by a continued miracle, and cheered by undoubted assurances of the protection of Heaven; their perverse disposition discovered itself, and they openly murmured at the decrees of him, whom they could not but own as their deliverer, and revere as their God. Their stubbornness and hardness of heart, in the generation which might have been blessed by the advent of Christ, is too clear and notorious to need demonstation; and it is certain, that at no former period

was the comparison in the text so fully exemplified, neither could it ever be applied with more propriety and force.

It were to be wished that its justice and propriety were confined to their age or nation, and that we ourselves were not included in the severity of the reproach. For however we may condemn the Jews for ingratitude, perverseness, and pride, our own manners, our own sentiments, and declarations, too strongly prove, that we are in general actuated by the same principles and modes of faith: their great error lay in confiding in their own worth and righteousness, and in expecting those benefits, as the just consequences of their own desert, which ought ever to be regarded and hoped for, as the free and unmerited gifts of God. Far from acknowledging that we daily receive more than we have any right to expect, more than we either "desire or deserve," we, as well as they, think ourselves aggrieved, if we are not gratified in any wish or petition, however absurd in its object, or pernicious in its tendency. And when, notwith-

notwithstanding our unworthiness, our Heavenly Father vouchsafes to render or continue to us blessings, of which, though we have long possessed them, we rarely know either the value or the use; how often does it happen, that we slight what ought to have worked our salvation, and turn what might have been, and was intended, for our benefit, into the means of our destruction? How often within our own memories has God graciously intervened, and saved this nation from misery, subjugation, and extreme distress? How frequently, during the course of the last ten years, have we felt in our hearts, and confessed with our lips, that we have been providentially saved from the devastation and misery which pervaded almost every other country in Europe, and that we alone have enjoyed in quiet and security the fruits of our labours, the advantages of a tolerant and reformed religion, and all those comforts which other nations so ardently sigh for, but which, it may be truly said, have been

possessed by scarcely any other but our own?

It might be useful, but I fear lamentable, to enquire, whether we have regarded these blessings with due thankfulness to the gracious Author of them, or whether we have not accounted them as our inheritance and right. If we have thus despitefully treated the blessings of our Lord, if we have not owned them with grateful acknowledgment, or, perhaps, not considered them as proceeding from him, from whom cometh *every good and every perfect gift;* how great is our ingratitude, how heinous our sin! Surely our hearts are not so much choaked with the good things of this world, as to be entirely insensible of those benefits, which, though they have been long continued to us, are not on that account less estimable, but which we ought ever to acknowledge as our most precious privilege, and our greatest good. Where are the people on the face of the globe, who have possessed such invaluable advantages, whose property has been so safe, whose homes are

so

so justly dear to them, whose personal rights are so well guarded, whose laws are so equitably administered, whose faith is so pure?

Our condition as individuals will not be found, I fear, more favourable to piety, or less deserving of the rebuke contained in the text. It may truly be said of a large proportion of our countrymen, that they are little affected by the success or depression of Christianity, and hear with equal indifference, whether the religion they profess, and which the Son of the Highest died to establish, has in their age been propagated and extended, or whether infidelity has increased. If worldly blessings are continued to them, it matters little, whether their faith flourishes, or is suffered to languish. They are heedless of the promises and invitation of their Saviour. If he pipes to them, with stupid carelessness they are averse to dance; if he mourns to them, they are too unfeeling to weep. Alike insensible of the present success of the Gospel, and their own future happiness, they go on in the same dull

dull round of amusement, and view the advancement or diminution of public virtue, with the same apathy as the rude and tasteless savage listens to the monotonous roar of the water-fall, or the sighings of the coming storm.

If this be a faithful picture of our condition and character, (and that it is, our own consciences too plainly tells us, and our manners and vices loudly proclaim,) how serious is the reflection, and how thankful ought we to be, that our Maker has not yet given us up to the punishment which befel the Jews, which we ourselves so richly merit, and which does indeed hang over our heads, and threatens to fall upon us before the next sabbath arrives. We all know and feel that we have in repeated instances rejected the most gracious calls to repentance, despised the fatherly correction of our Creator, and if not in words, at least by our actions, have clearly intimated, that we care not for the threatenings of Omnipotence, nor are at all thankful for his love.

No

No crime is more universally detested in society than ingratitude, or gives more pain to our own bosoms: he who is insensible and does not acknowledge benefits that are past, is always considered as unworthy of those that might follow hereafter, is necessarily unhappy in himself, is shunned by the virtuous, and is not courted by the bad. If then this be considered as so criminal among our fellow-men, how atrocious must it be when manifested against Him, on whose beneficence we can have no claim, and from whose unmerited, and often unsolicited mercy, we can only receive the benefits we wish, or can be protected from the evils which we fear; whose purity we have all provoked by sin, which we are perpetually committing, whose holiness we have all offended, but who ceases not to pour down blessings upon us, and to give us proofs of his unwearied tenderness and care. To innumerate the acts of beneficence which God has bestowed on the human race, would be endless, and far beyond my capacity or skill.

skill. Every one whose heart is not altogether alienated from the love and fear of God, must be sensible that every thing which affords him comfort here, or on which he builds his hopes of happiness hereafter, proceeds immediately from his Creator; and will readily and devoutly confess that the *Lord God is full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering, plenteous in goodness and truth.*

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

ON THE SERVICE OF GOD.

ROMANS vi. 16.

Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey.

HOWEVER mortifying to the pride, and contrary to the professed sentiments of mankind, especially in the present age, may be the doctrine, that we must all be considered as servants: yet reason, revelation, and experience, alike assure us, that no man, however exalted be his rank, or refined his understanding, can be said to be exempt from the service of his Maker, or the yoke of iniquity. Man was originally placed upon earth, as much to execute the service of God, as to promote his own happiness. Happiness he soon deservedly lost, by impairing the glory of his

his Creator, by rebelling against that first and simple command, the obedience or violation of which was appointed to be the trial of his virtue, and the test of his fidelity. It is not of the smallest consequence of what this test consisted. Whether it was comprised in a constant exercise of labour, or only in the cropping of a flower, the violation of the law of his Creator was equally express, and equally sinful. We well know, that the wit of the infidel, and the coarse raillery of the profane, have been often pretendedly excited by the description of the act of primeval iniquity. The majesty of God offended by so seemingly trivial a fault, as the plucking and taste of forbidden fruit; paradise, innocence, and immortality, forfeited, and man seduced with an apple, has been often deemed by the faithless "worth their laughter." But our opinion of this action will be much more just and apposite, when we consider, that this was the only sin which our forefather had any temptation to, or perhaps could possibly commit; that he had been sufficiently

sufficiently warned of the consequences, and knew that he was thereby forfeiting all claim to the protection of God, violating his single injunction, and disobeying his only prohibitory law. And to those who desire not so much to pry into the impenetrable secrets, the incomprehensible counsels of the Almighty, as to attain his promises, and secure their own salvation, the description of the fall of our first parents must appear as the gracious communication of Him, who *worketh all things, after the counsels of his own will*, and they may with propriety reply to the sneers of the unbeliever in the words of Job, *know, that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.*

It is not, however, to explain or treat of the doctrine of original sin, but to convince you of the present state and real condition of all men, that I have selected the words of the text; which were not less repugnant to those to whom they were originally addressed, to the proud, triumphant, and haughty Roman, to the conceited philosophers, the arrogant conquerors

querors of the world in the time and court of Nero, than to the sceptical, self-wise infidel of the modern school. For what can be more repugnant to the generally avowed opinions, what more contrary to the spirit of the present times, than a confession of obedience? To serve, even our Maker, is too frequently considered as the proof of an abject spirit, of pusillanimity, and abject fear. What is more generous, say the men of this world, than the gratification of appetite? What more noble than freedom of sentiment and conduct? What more galling than the sensation of restraint? What more contemptible than a sense of awe? Yet a sense of false shame, a sense of honour, as it is often called by the world, influences almost every man who pretends to elevation of sentiment, or even the character of worth and honesty. So unwilling are we to walk in the path of righteousness, so sore under a reasonable, and, one might say, an imaginary burden, that we frequently enrol ourselves among the bands of sin, and become the faithless disciples of

of a vain philosophy, rather than be thought to be checked in our conduct, or influenced in opinion, by the precepts of our Redeemer, and the words of our God. We seem not to know, that *to whom we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are to whom we obey.* For no man ever lived, who could so far divest himself of the shackles of the world, who was so entirely free from the necessary contingencies which all feel, and none can foresee; no one ever lived, who could positively affirm, that he was free from the influence of passion, and not subject to inclinations and appetites, which he did not then or afterwards know to be vicious, or found to be faulty. Not only our own feelings, if properly weighed and remembered, but the experience of the world, and the conduct of other men, will convince us, that we are more frequently led away insensibly by passion, and a fondness for sensual objects, than directed by reason, or guided by any rule of moral excellence. This is evident not less from the profane history of past ages,

and a due observance of our own, than from examples recorded, and precepts in scripture *written for our learning;* which ought surely to have more weight than all the deductions of human reason, or the longest, and most constant experience of man. But to speak plainly, so bad are the times, so faithless and perverse is the present generation, that many would rather derive information from any other source than the Bible, and wish to exalt their own understandings, their own frail, finite intellect, at the expence of revelation, and even in opposition to the words of their God. Even among those who wish to be thought, and perhaps really esteem themselves disciples of Christ, there are some who will not receive any doctrine that is not in unison with that standard which they have themselves chosen as the limit of devotional conformity, and the barrier of religious truth. Without considering, or which is worse, without allowing, and, therefore, denying, that *all scripture is given from inspiration of God,* and, consequently, *cannot be broken,*

they garble the holy scriptures at their pleasure, they reject as obsolete, or despise as absurd, whatever militates against their own opinion of truth and rectitude. And some have gone so far as to put aside whatever was not, as they say, insisted on immediately by our Saviour. Thus they think it no sin to dispute, and arrogantly deny many passages in St. Paul's epistles, because, say they, they were written by a mortal, and cannot be proved to have been taught by our Lord during the continuance of his ministry, nor were uttered or written while he himself remained upon earth. But this wretched subterfuge carries with it not less absurdity than irreverence, it bears on the very face of it the stamp of infidelity, and forms for its followers the most flimsy apology, the most artificial and feeble defence. Better had they at once avow themselves the servants of sin, better had they throw off entirely all profession of religion, and substitute morality, or reason, or sentiment, or any other title the God of this world may choose to be worshipped, in

its stead. The smallest consideration will serve to convince us, that the rejection of any part of canonical scripture must involve in it consequences most pernicious to the credit of the Gospel, and constitutes a crime of the greatest magnitude. Many of the epistles were written much earlier than the works of the Evangelists, and ought and must be regarded as the genuine precepts of the Holy Spirit. Every part of the Bible was written by holy men of God, who recorded and spake *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* The rejection, therefore, of any part of prophecy or scripture approaches, more nearly than most men seem to be aware, to that momentous guilt, that dreadful sin, *which shall not be forgiven unto men.* The horrible consequences of which have led me into a digression from a close interpretation of the text, but which at no time can be void of interest to those who regard the scripture with reverence, or an aberration of duty with fear.

Since servitude then is the lot and inheritance of man, it is of the first import-

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ance to find a master whose service is easy, and whose burden is light. Faithful service is proved by obedience: if we pretend to be the servants of God, and yet obey the will and direction of other masters, our obedience is eye-service, and our profession of attachment not from the heart. Nothing is more easy than the knowledge of our duty, and nothing more gratifying, to the truly pious, than its uniform pursuit. Our service is, indeed, as our liturgy aptly expresses it, perfect freedom. This will be clearly manifest, and abundantly cheering, when we recall to our recollection, what it is that God requires from us, what we are to execute, and what we are to gain. He requires from us nothing hard or painful, nothing that does not promise and afford the truest happiness, and will ensure to us eternal peace. His service consists in humble devotion, willing obedience, and earnest and grateful praise. Yet no one can be devout who is not faithful, nor faithful who is not thankful for the bounty of his Creator, and willingly obedient to his law. Faith consists not

in a mere historical belief that certain events have happened, and certain persons existed: this even the devils believe, and therefore do they tremble. But the faith by which *we have boldness and access* to our Lord, is a rooted conviction that we are by nature corrupt, and by inclination sinful: that we are all *shapen in iniquity*, and justly liable to divine wrath, not only as the posterity of guilty parents, but for the proneness, the innate disposition of every one, to stray from the law of his Creator, and pursue those practices, and indulge such opinions, as are derogatory to his dignity, and directly tend to dishonour his name. It is a firm persuasion, that through the merits and intercession of Him who *hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; we are justified by his blood, and shall be saved from wrath through him. Where is boasting then? It is excluded, for if righteousness come by the law, then is Christ dead in vain.* Faith then is the only refuge, the only true prop and consolation of a Christian, without which every action of our lives must

must be imperfect, and even our seemingly good opinions will, if duly traced and sifted, be ever found to have a taint of sin, and a bias to corruption. We must be convinced, as much by the conversation of the world, and the practice of its votaries, as by the express word of revelation, that *we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.* How strictly incumbent on us is it then, to strive continually to please, and dutifully to serve him, to make his service the principal business of our lives, the chief object of our endeavours, and the pride of our affections. Then shall we no longer dread or deserve the reproach which our Lord uttered by the mouth of his prophet against his chosen people. *If I be a father, where is my honour? If I be a master, where is my fear?*

The service of God requires also mental gratitude, as well as positive and visible acts of devotion. We cannot be said readily *to yield ourselves servants to obey* Him, who cannot claim, and does not

receive, the service of the heart, as well as the *calves of the lips.* We cannot be said to be true disciples of Christ, unless we *delight in the law of God after the inward man.* Our lives may be moral, our practice temperate, and our manners charming, but unless we feel in our hearts, and are convinced in our minds, that from God alone *cometh every perfect gift*, that without his almighty and paternal aid, our condition would be wretched, our minds callous, and our life a burden; we have not attained that frame and disposition of heart which the pious feel, which Christ inculcated, and which is requisite before we can be admitted into those joys *which God hath prepared for those that love him.* This temper of mind is no less necessary for the enjoyment of Heaven, than its attainment: without it even the charms of paradise would pall, the praises of God become a task, and eternal life distasteful: and if even we anticipate, or faintly conceive celestial happiness, it is when our souls are transported with a sense of the goodness of the Lord, our thoughts occupied

occupied in the contemplation of his mercy, and in earnest attempts to glorify his name.

To be convinced of the use and propriety of thankfulness, and to be excited to feel and express it, nothing more is necessary, than just sentiments, and recollections of the blessings which God bestows; the continuance of which solely constitutes our happiness, and the want or even intermission of which would at once leave us without support or consolation; without the means of averting the miseries of human life, and without the spirit to encounter them. Every convenience we possess, every delight we feel, and every good we hope for, must proceed primarily from Him, whose servants we are, whose omnipotence we should invariably adore, whose bounty we should freely confess, and whose mercy we should continually praise. This is the most indispensible, the least return we can make for benefits which are almost always misapplied, and which too often serve to pamper pride, and engender malignity;

malignity; but which were bestowed on us for very different purposes. It is not, indeed, to be expected, that those *who yield themselves servants to obey* the world and all its train of vanities and dissipation, should properly apply the means which God affords to the consolation of their poorer brethren, to the service of righteousness, or the advancement of truth. Yet the many active monitors of the uncertainty, and short duration of human life, the sting of remorse, the gripe of disease, and the unwelcome, though unconquerable, sense of eternity, would excite them to thoughts more adapted to their real condition, if ever they suffered themselves to meditate, to commune with their own hearts; if they were not the constant, the willing slaves of sin, and had not truly and heartily entered into the service of Mammon.

May all of us duly consider, and properly estimate the duties and rewards which are attached to the servants of Christ; may we never lose sight of that recompense which is inestimable, eternal, and

and certainly our own, if we earnestly endeavour to obey the commands of Him who is at once our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Judge. So may we humbly and piously hope, when we have completed our service in this life, to hear those enchanting sounds, *Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

SERMON

SERMON XVII.

BEFORE A SACRAMENT.

2 KINGS, v. 12.

Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?

SO perverse is the disposition of man, and so powerful his prejudices, that whatever he cannot reconcile to his own reason, or belief, however calculated it may be for his interest, or prompted by duty, he is apt to disregard and despise. Buoyed up with the consciousness of our superiority over other animals, and many of us with our advantages over other men; we too often imagine ourselves competent to judge of things which are naturally above our sense and comprehension, and think that we have a right to demand explanation of the means and reasons of those

those blessings which we ought to receive with mute humility and a thankful heart. While we continue to receive blessings from our Creator, it matters not to us, what are the methods he employs, in order to convey to us assurances of his paternal love and protection. We know that they are all undeserved, that we have nothing to claim from his justice, but much to ask from his mercy. Even the ordinary blessings which are daily showered down upon us in plentiful profusion, call for our constant gratitude and praise; how much more then do those signal instances of mercy, which we have all received at his hands.

There are none, I trust, so stupid and ungrateful, as to deny that they have received many blessings which have assured them of the watchful care of Providence, and ought to have taught them reverence for his power, and respect to his commands. There is not, I firmly believe, *one* who has attained the age of manhood, but can recollect some instance of the peculiar care of his Almighty Father,

Father, some wonderful deliverance from accident, some narrow evitation of danger which could only be effected by the immediate interposition of Heaven, and which obliged him to confess at the instant, that to infinite and immortal power alone, he owed his escape. We know that the designs of God are inscrutable, and so must be the means by which he effects them: we surely should not refuse to credit their efficacy, because we cannot discover their nature or their use.

But many of us are perverse enough to neglect the means of salvation, because they are easy and simple; because we cannot tell, how by such facile methods, such great and momentous designs can be brought about. This was the case with Naaman in the text. He had been long and grievously afflicted with the leprosy; a disorder which had baffled the powers of medicine, and from which it seems he despaired of relief; till he had heard from one of his slaves, of the extraordinary cures wrought by Elisha, the servant of a God he despised, and whose existence he

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was not dispósed to credit. Willing, however, to let no chance of recovery escape him, and persuaded by the report of his wonderful miracles, he determined to visit this strange Prophet, and travelled with a large suite of servants, and immense loads of wealth to recompense Elisha for the trouble, which he supposed he must take in restoring him to health. He expected, no doubt, that his recovery must be effected by long and repeated trials of art and medicine, or that the Prophet would have enjoined him some strict regimen which would, if adhered to, at length effect his cure. He was willing to submit to the most nauseous and severe expedients, which might tend to deliver him from a disease that had been declared incurable, and which deprived him of the enjoyment of his ample fortune, and of every comfort of life. When arrived at the habitation of Elisha, he was displeased that he paid so little respect to one who was so honourably attended, and that he answered by the mouth of his servant the enquiries and request of Naaman, whose eagerness

eagerness to be admitted into the presence of Elisha, it may be supposed, was proportionable to his solicitude for his recovery, and the hopes he entertained of the success of the means which Elisha would prescribe. When, therefore, he found that the Prophet neither came out to meet him, nor invited him into his house, which he refrained to do, in all likelihood, in order to make trial of his faith, and convince him it was not by natural means that he would effect his cure, and that he had no occasion to see or converse with him; but that whatever he accomplished was done by prayer and intercession with his God. When Naaman had heard that he prescribed to him a method of cure, which might not be purchased by wealth, and which he could not obtain more easily, than the meanest of his slaves. When he received the command to go and wash seven times in Jordan, a river whose waters contained nothing medicinal, he felt provoked at the directions he had received, and convinced, perhaps by sad experience, of the

inefficacy of a bath, he incredulously exclaimed: *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? And he turned and went away in a rage.*

There are, perhaps, few in this assembly, who are not ready to condemn the incredulity and impetuous scorn of Naaman, and were there any glaring instance of a man of the same intemperate passion, he would, probably, be the object of their pity or contempt. But, perhaps, it may be found, that Naaman's is by no means, even in this age or nation, an uncommon character. Many who profess themselves Christians, are conscious of crimes which they know deserve punishment, are sincerely desirous of reconciling themselves to their Creator, and earnestly wish to *be washed from their iniquity, and cleansed from their sin:* yet refuse the means prescribed by Him, whom they own to be their Lord and Saviour; and although he invites them by the most endearing persuasion to attend his holy table, and promises that by means

of this divine ordinance, they shall receive remission of their sins, and assurance of pardon, yet they wilfully, not to say incredulously, turn from the blessings held out to them, and like the faithless Naaman perversely refuse to *wash and be clean.*

When we consider the importance of this sacrament, and call to our remembrance those awful and positive words of our Saviour, *except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you;* and reflect on the vast number of those, who profess themselves Christians, who, so far from embracing every opportunity of celebrating the sufferings of Christ, and of partaking of the blessings of his death and resurrection; never have partaken of the communion in their lives: we should be almost tempted to think, that they really did not believe the Gospel, or that they considered the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ as by no means "necessary to salvation." And the latter of these is too often actually the case. Many suppose that their duty is fully performed, if they attend regularly

some place of public worship on a Sunday, and refrain on the other days of the week from any notorious sin: if they live among their neighbours with honesty and decorum, they think they have done all that is required of them. But however they may now reconcile this rejection of the invitation of their Saviour, this refusal to partake of the benefits which Christ purchased for them by his blood, this tacit confession of their hope, that there may be some other way found out, by which they may obtain the benefits of Christ's death without obedience to his commands: yet there will a time come, when their refusal to attend the Sacrament will be remembered with the keenest anguish, and the most bitter remorse. In the days of health and prosperity we too often disregard the most simple and easy means of reconciling our souls to God, and are too much influenced by pride and worldly avocations to consider these rejections of God's mercy and covenant, as positive and heinous crimes. But in a dying hour our sentiments of their guilt and baseness will be far more

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just and terrible, they will then rise up as the ghosts of sins long past, and appear among the number of those crimes which have been long ago committed and forgotten; but which will then rear their hideous heads, and rise on the surface of the memory, as sunken rocks are seen above the waters at the departure of the ebbing tide.

Our Saviour has positively declared, *whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life:* and these words, in every nation of Christendom, and in every age of the church, have been understood to apply to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper: by a worthy reception of which, all our sins are blotted out; and we are made by a mystical union members of the body of Christ: *we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his spirit.* How this union is effected, it is not our business to enquire; all we have to do is to prepare our minds to receive worthily these inestimable benefits. It does become us curiously to investigate the manner how our souls are purified by the

reception of the Holy Communion, but to accept the blessing with pious gratitude and meek devotion. We are sure that he who ordained this sacred rite, is holy, just, and true, and would never have holden out to us promises which he will not amply fulfil.

I am the more earnest in impressing upon your minds the necessity of sacramental communion at this time, as a great part of the present congregation have recently bound themselves to obey all the ordinances of the Lord, and promised in the face of the Church, at the time of their Confirmation, to cast off the shackles of sin, and by every means in their power endeavour after a life of purity and innocence. They may be sure no means are so proper, efficacious, or sure, as those appointed by Christ himself: and that if they do not embrace the earliest opportunity of attending at his holy table, there will arise in their minds a repugnance, a negligence to receive this benefit, which is not less culpable, because it assumes the shape of fear, is clad sometimes by the

the great adversary of man in the garb of humility, and puts on the semblance of meekness and despondent virtue. An unwillingness to partake of the Supper of the Lord must either proceed from a conviction of unworthiness, or a disbelief of the benefits which God has promised. The criminality of those who live in the quiet continuance of either of these errors, is great and palpable. If they be unworthy, the greater need have they to stop in their career of sin; their refusal to communicate only indicates a determination to be sinful. If they disbelieve the promises of God, if they do not credit the words of their Saviour, better had they not pretend to the name of Christians, or ever come where they may hear his Gospel; for they must listen only to their condemnation, and learn with sensible remorse and reluctance that *God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

It has been objected by some defamers of our holy religion, that the doctrine of remission of sins by a participation of the

Communion, tends to favour the cause of immorality, that if a man can procure absolution of his offences, by the mere act of eating and drinking of consecrated viands, he will sin with a high hand, and think himself, whilst in health at least, safe and secure; and be tempted to commit the most heinous crimes, when he has so easy assurance of pardon. But this objection has been unjustly urged; no one ever pretended that the simple act of eating bread, and drinking wine, conferred on the impenitent sinner pardon or peace. He who approaches the holy table without a thorough conviction of the baseness of his past sins, and a steady resolution to forsake them, commits an act of insult and mockery in the more immediate presence of his Saviour, and is guilty of a crime which he can only hope to expiate by a long course of penitence and prayer. No sin certainly can be more dreadful and daring, than to approach the Lord's Table with a design of repeating our offences, and a wish of *returning like a dog*

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to his vomit again, and like a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

But the apprehension of committing this crime, is no excuse for absenting ourselves, since by our constant absence we only proclaim to the world, and avow to our Almighty Father, that we are wedded to our vicious habits, and are determined to continue in the indulgence of them, that we have no inclination to forsake our sins, and are not yet willing to *wash and be clean.*

Let no one then pretend that his absence from the altar of the Lord arises from a dread of offending him, and that he is deterred from partaking of the Lord's Supper, because he fears he has not on the wedding garment; let him rather say, that he does not credit the promises of his Saviour, that he hopes to avoid the terrors of another world, and to attain a state of happiness by other methods, than those prescribed by Christ himself, that he is prompted to exclaim with Naaman: *Are not Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus,*

mascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?

I hope I have sufficiently pointed out the folly and impiety of this sentiment, and convinced you, that through faith in the promises of Jesus Christ, a hearty resolution of amendment, and sincere repentance, we all have it in our power to be reconciled to our Creator, who now invites you to his table, and earnestly requests you to *wash and be clean.*

SERMON

SERMON XVIII.

ON PENITENTIAL AFFECTION.

St. Luke vii. 42.

Tell me which of them will love him most?

To reform mankind by conciliation, and teach religion by persuasive address; to inculcate purity by example, and mildly reclaim men from vice, is a distinguishing feature in the Gospel, the peculiar characteristic of Christ. During our Saviour's ministry on earth, he did not confine his attention to the synagogue, or stated assemblies of the people, but in common conversation, and in the ordinary course of life, mixed religion with familiarity, and enforced virtue and godliness as much by his manners and conduct, as by the authority of his preaching, and the efficacy of his word. Although his eloquence must be supposed

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to have been singularly strong and convincing, although he confirmed the excellence of his doctrine by a most astonishing display of miracles, although his auditors confessed that *never man spake like this man;* he was not less willing to afford instruction in private houses, than to a crowded audience in the temple: he was not more ready to publish the Gospel of Peace to an eager and admiring assembly, than in the dwelling of an humble individual; he drew his arguments not more frequently from the authenticated pages of the prophets, and the acknowledged history of the Jewish people, than from the passing incidents of the day, and the ordinary occurrences of private life. His precepts are all of importance, and none of them can ever justly suffer neglect or abrogation; for though many of them refer to the private history of those to whom they were spoken, none of them are void of interest or use: they tend alike to the promotion of domestic happiness and public virtue, to the welfare of every man, and every community,

community, to the establishment of social happiness, and universal peace. With a view to extend more widely the advantages of his Gospel, and to render his religion more generally known, and more chearfully embraced; he frequented the house of every one who was ready to receive him, he conversed freely with every rank of society, and to those who were not offended with his mean appearance, and did not disdain the humble character in which he walked in this world, he readily communicated his doctrine and instructions: he assumed not the austere manners of a sage, nor the vain arrogance of a scribe, but reproved vice, and preached righteousness with the benignity of a parent, and the admonition of a friend.

While he remained in the house of a Pharisee, who had "desired that he would "eat with him," there entered a woman, who was a sinner, and who besides the most lively testimonies of faith in his character, and reverence for his person, evinced the strongest penitence for her past transgressions, and earnest wishes

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for pity and forgiveness. The Pharisee, who could not, perhaps, accuse himself of any direct violation of the law, or of morality, felt offended at the freedom with which our Saviour permitted her to approach him, and supposed that the easiness with which he treated her, betrayed an ignorance of her character, and was a proof that he could not be the prophet he pretended, nor entitled to the authority he assumed. He expected no doubt that Jesus would have reprobated her past conduct, spurned her with indignation, and reproached her with her crimes. His own strict virtue and self-righteousness could not stoop to converse with, or to pity the distressed slave of iniquity; she had fallen from innocence, and was, therefore, in his opinion, undeserving of compassion, and was the proper object of punishment and hate. Her case was, probably, similar to that of many others of the daughters of infamy, who are compelled to wander in the maze of wickedness, because they have slipped off the path of virtue, who are obliged to associate

associate with the infamous, because they are abandoned by the chaste.

On our Saviour her distress, her tears, and contrition, excited sentiments of an opposite nature, and produced expressions of a far different tendency. Though her sins might have been as scarlet, yet when washed in the tears of sincere repentance, they became in the eyes of him, *who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not*, as white as snow; though they might have been *red like crimson*, by faithful hope, and real penitence, they became *as wool*. Christ called not for austere demeanour, affected righteousness, and stated forms of devotion, but sincerity of heart, repentance for past transgression, and a steady and earnest purpose of amendment. He preached the necessity of that *faith which worketh by love*: and declared the love of God to be the first and great commandment, the surest title to eternal favour, and the most active motive to obedience. Nothing, indeed, more distinguishes the Gospel from every other religion, or code of morality, which has been obtruded on

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the world either before or since its publication, than its influence on the feelings of man, his gratitude, and affection. While other religious systems have affected to guide and elevate the reason, and some even to indulge the vicious propensities of nature, this addresses itself directly to the heart. And not only arrests the sinner when harbouring a criminal desire, or meditating on any wicked action, but in the stillest life, in the most humble condition of our nature, will interest, and comfort, and exercise the soul; and if not impeded by vicious habits and confirmed iniquity, will not fail to form the plastic mind of man into the divine semblance and image of his Maker.

In order to convince the Pharisee of the justice and propriety of pardoning the penitent, and of commiserating the lot of contrite humility, our Saviour introduced the short and simple parable of a *creditor, which had two debtors, one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty: and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.* It must be apparent to

to the meanest capacity that the creditor must here be understood to represent the Lord of heaven and earth, and by the debtors are meant all or any of the children of men. That all mankind are indebted to their Creator, none, I trust, will deny; and few will scruple to own, that besides the continual, and too often forgotten blessings of provision, and hourly protection from evil, and from threatened or accidental calamity; we have all reason to admire and acknowledge the long suffering patience of God, who does not immediately punish guilt at its instant perpetration, who does not at once chastise those sins and criminal affections to which all are incident, and from which not even the purest are free. For such is the corruption, such the frailty of man, that the most devout have confessed that their devotion is often disturbed and weakened by the intrusion of some worldly thought, or impure desire, which will arise in the mind without their consent or inclination, which seem to creep upon them clandestinely, and which can only be accounted

for or excited by the grand adversary of man. But sentiments of impurity, if not harboured in the heart, nor indulged with gratification; if driven out as soon as they are perceived by religious contemplation; if expelled as soon as they arise by those means which Christ has afforded, which the Gospel immediately furnishes, and which it was directly promulged to bestow. In this case, instead of vitiating the mind, or rendering it unfit for Heaven, they may tend to its purification, and may be thought to have a similar effect on the soul as a physical plant has on the body, if eaten largely and fed upon, it will necessarily produce death and corruption, but if taken medicinally, and succeeded by wholesome aliment, will contribute to cleanse and purify the frame, and establish its health and preservation.

The Pharisee, on our Saviour's proposing to him this parable, immediately perceived and confessed the justice of his reasoning, though not directly his ultimate drift and design. And on being questioned which of the debtors of the indulgent creditor would

would *love him most?* At once declared, *I suppose him to whom he forgave most.* Which was precisely the answer our Saviour wanted, and which, indeed, naturally sprung from the interrogation, and the circumstances of the case. From the positive assent which our Saviour gave his answer, *Thou hast rightly judged,* may be collected the comfortable assurance of remission of sins upon sincere repentance, and that the humble thankfulness, and meek contrition of a guilty penitent, is more acceptable in the sight of God, than the strict, and too often uncharitable virtue of a rigid moralist. It is this assurance of mercy, that lightens the load of affliction, and buoys up the soul, which would otherwise sink amidst the waters of strife and despair, with a well-founded hope of pardon and forgiveness. There are, it is well known, many who wish to reduce Christianity into a dry insipid system of ethics, who would make the mission and doctrine of Christ to consist merely in the publication of moral precepts, and injunctions of virtue; who assert that im-

partial justice to society, a strict undeviating attention to the principles of honesty and honour, is the sum and substance of all religion, the only title to divine favour, and the whole, the aggregate duty of man. But these people grossly deceive themselves, and do as much injury to the cause of real goodness, as they underrate and despise the sufferings and merits of our Saviour; and were they to consider or be told of the multiplied and shameful enormities which have been practised and authorized by the best and purest teachers of moral rectitude, they would be compelled to confess, that the love of virtue for its own sake is a brittle shield when opposed to the shafts of interest, that we all meet with temptations, from which a firm trust in the Almighty can alone deliver us, that the love of this world, the insidious wiles of pleasure, the blandishments of loose gratification, can only be effectually resisted by *the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.*

It

It is an unhappy and very common error of the present day to be swayed as much in opinion as practice, by prejudice, interest, and pride. And when any doctrine is promulgated, however opposite it may be to Revelation and the Scripture, which either flatters our self-consequence, or relieves us from obligation, it is always well received, and strenuously supported; and is often set up against the precepts of the Gospel, and the law of Christ. And scarcely any doctrine of our faith has met with more opposition, or been exposed to more contention and ridicule, than the great article of the corruption of our nature, and the Fall of Man. Few are willing to confess their propensity to evil habits, and the necessity of a Saviour to redeem them from sin, and deliver them from its fatal consequences. But to estimate aright the love of God to sinful man, we must not only consider the great blessings of creation, and continual preservation from the various ills of this life, but we must take into the account, and suffer it to sink deeply into our memories, the

wonderful love of Christ, who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, who has not only rescued us from the guilt of retaining the corrupt affections, which are the offspring of the sin of our first parents, but by his precious blood-shedding has secured to us pardon upon our sincere repentance, even of actual and premeditated guilt. It must be confessed, indeed, that some very well disposed men, by suffering their minds to dwell too long and intensely on the corruption of their nature, the baseness of sin, its cognate relation to man, and the desert of eternal punishment, have fallen into errors which Christianity disowns and abhors, such are the impossibility of pardon after deliberate transgression, and eternal reprobation. Our faculties are, indeed, too narrow and confined to perceive directly the grand designs of our Maker: human intellect is too contracted to comprehend without close thought, and elaborate enquiry, the great doctrine of atonement: neither is it necessary, or proper, to dwell too much on doctrines which

which are, and must be in their nature too abstruse, too dazzling and brilliant to be viewed with steadiness and precision by the finite sense of a human creature. By thinking perpetually and separately on any article of our religion, which is confessedly mysterious, we shall find ourselves invariably involved in doubt and uncertainty: we shall not fail to collect clouds of obscurity and horror, which will inevitably darken the intellectual horizon, and screen those rays of comfort which would otherwise direct our steps, and illumine our path to a blessed eternity.

But independent of those truths which however mysterious, are sure, and important, and undeniable, there are others which every one must perceive and know by his own sense and experience. Sin is plainly universal, and punishment withheld. And we cannot too powerfully feel the kind mercy of our Creator, or too frequently enforce or consider the necessity of redemption through Jesus Christ: since the denial of it is one of the most

prevailing errors which characterise this age or nation: men have been always ready enough to consider and to prize their own abilities, their virtues, and their worth: but it was reserved for this faithless, licentious, and ungrateful period to deny the merits of our Saviour, to call in question the corruption of man, and the congeniality of sin to his nature. It was left for these our days openly to extenuate the necessity, and to underrate the value of redemption. And though we have not yet gone so far, as to throw off entirely the form of godliness, though we have not yet professed, that the love of God is useless and absurd; it is much to be feared that *the blood of the covenant is counted* by many *an unholy*, or at least a trivial *thing*. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves*, and deny the necessity of *an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous*. And the stronger the conviction of the want and advantage of a crucified Redeemer the warmer will be our love, and the more prompt and steady our obedience. It is not an ostentatious display

display of unbiassed virtue, it is not vast professions of strict morality, that cleanses the heart, and maketh it pure in the sight of God. It is not a vain and too often unfair comparison of our own merits with the vices of other men: it is not a plausible and specious appearance of honesty, or of that watch-word of infidelity, honour, that will procure us the favour of God. It is that meekness of temper, that humility of heart, and sincere endeavour to frame our minds according to the precepts of the Gospel, that God accepts, and will most richly reward. If we think that the purity of our morals, the regularity of our lives, the fairness of our reputation, will be a sufficient passport to the realms of eternal felicity; if we suppose that we can barter our own works at the gate of Heaven, and purchase with them a secure and honourable seat in the presence of our Maker; if we think ourselves unfairly dealt with, if our deservings are not acknowledged and approved by the justice of the Deity, if we disclaim all reliance on the mercy of Christ, all desire to be included

included in his comprehensive lenity, all wish for pardon, and all hope in his love; we have, indeed, reached the summit, the very apex of impiety, and have been set by the tempter on the highest pinacle of the temple of sin, from which he will easily persuade us to cast ourselves down, and plunge into the abyss of destruction.

The love of God then, and a candid and grateful acknowledgment of what Christ hath done and suffered for us, is the purest spring of piety, and the most holy as well as the most natural affection of the human heart. It is also the most powerful inducement to practise devotion to our Maker, and charity to man. If one man considers the comforts and blessings which he enjoys in this life, as his desert and inheritance, and supposes he may justly claim them, unless he be guilty of some flagrant enormity, or atrocious violation of the laws of man or of morality. If he think that his nature demands, and his worth deserves, pleasure and prosperity in this world, and immortal happiness in the next. And if another with meek contrition

and

and humble gratitude confess, that all he receives, and all he hopes for, is the free unmerited gift of our beneficent Almighty Father, that he is corrupt by nature, prone to evil, *sold under sin*, that under the administration of rigid justice, he could expect no comfort in this life, and could have no hope in the next, but that through the sufferings, death, and mediation of Jesus Christ, through faith in his merits, and obedience to his word, he hopes his sins may be pardoned, and that he shall at length be received into the mansions of eternal bliss. *Tell me, which of them will love him most?*

SERMON

SERMON XIX.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

St. Luke xxiv. 11.

Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

WHATEVER influence the doctrine and conduct of our Saviour might have had on his disciples during his abode with them on earth; and however strong might have been their faith, and sanguine their hopes, while they beheld him healing disease with a touch, and stilling the tempest by his word: yet he was no sooner apprehended and delivered into the hands of the magistrate as a criminal, than *they all forsook him:* unable to bear this apparent subversion of their hopes, this seemingly entire defeat of their master's power and authority, they were struck with

with dismay and astonishment: and at the final ruin of his cause as they esteemed it by his crucifixion, they dispersed in despair, or if they met to bewail their misfortune, it was *secretly for fear of the Jews:* having now no dependance on their Lord who had died and was buried, and who, they supposed, was unable to afford protection to his disciples; as he had himself suffered every pain and insult which human power could execute, or malignant cruelty invent. So sunk, indeed, was their confidence, and so languid their faith in their crucified Redeemer, that when the women returned, who had carried to the sepulchre spices to embalm his body, and reported that he was risen, and that they had seen a vision of angels, *their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.*

This slowness of heart in the disciples to believe the resurrection of our Saviour may be accounted for by considering the perplexed state of their minds and circumstances, and their entire relinquishment of hope. They had, it seems, all

of them entertained the national prejudice of the Jews with regard to the Messiah, by expecting him as a temporal prince, who would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel: his death and sufferings must necessarily have put an end to all views of dominion, and all hopes of participating in his regal state. Convinced as they had been, by the many miracles, which Christ had performed during the course of his ministry, by the accomplishment and agreement of numerous prophecies fulfilled in his person and at his birth, that he was *indeed that prophet that should come into the world.* Yet so biassed were their minds by education, by early prepossession, and by the common acceptation of the passages in the prophetical volume relating to the character and office of Christ; that when all hopes of temporal power were annihilated by his death, they were struck with consternation. When they heard that cruel taunt of the scribes, which they uttered while he hung upon the cross, *he saved others himself he cannot save*, faith was extinguished,

guished, hope abandoned, and their minds filled with anxious fear, dejection, and alarm. When they heard the eager and exulting shouts of his inveterate enemies, they were little disposed to believe that he would return and *abide with them for ever*. His ability to save by a miracle, they supposed must have ended with his life, his power was now defeated by death, by that cruel and ignominious execution, which as he had suffered, they had reason to presume he could not have escaped. What had they to expect from those who had crucified their Lord and Master, but insult, cruelty, and disgrace? They dared not assemble but in secret, and knew not where to turn for consolation or support. In this state of terror and distraction, it is not, surely, surprising that when an account was brought to them of his resurrection, *they believed not for joy*, that they treated it as an improbable fiction, as *an idle tale, and believed it not.*

So little confidence had the disciples of our Lord in his former promises, that he would see them again, and send them another

another comforter; and so little did they understand the nature and description of the kingdom of Christ, that even when he appeared to them personally, they had not then a proper and clear conception of his resurrection, *they were terrified and affrighted*, and seem to have distrusted their sight. It was of the last importance that the apostles should have had the most positive and the clearest evidence, that our Saviour rose from the dead in the very body in which he suffered. If this could not have been ascertained, Christianity would have been defective in the very article, on which the greatest stress is laid in scripture: the actual resurrection of Christ being the great hinge on which the divinity of our Saviour must turn, and on which the verity of the Gospel must rest. This is confessed by the enemies of our faith, and is proved by the weak and improbable account which the Jews gave of the loss of the body of Jesus. Their report was, indeed, as glaringly absurd as it was impotently false. How was it possible for the dis-

ciples, whose courage had been dampt by the death of their master, to have taken the body by stealth? The sepulchre was guarded by soldiers, and they must have been detered from any attempt of this nature as well by fears for their own safety, as the difficulty of success. Warned as they were of the prophecy of our Saviour, that *after three days he would rise again*, the Jews had taken every precaution against surprise or removal, *sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

We are told, that when the disciples first saw Jesus after he was risen, they discredited the resurrection of his body, and *supposed they had seen a spirit.* If the evidence had not been unquestionable that Christ re-appeared corporeally on earth, the enemies of our faith would not have failed to have availed themselves of its weakness: his appearance after death would have been classed among those numerous stories of apparitions which craft or ignorance have spread among mankind. But the most credulous believer in the appearance of departed spirits

never attempted to assert that the body accompanied the soul in its wanderings, or could withstand the corruption of the grave: neither would any one have been so daring as to affirm that he had risen, if his corpse had been produced. And from the known vigilance and malignant caution of his enemies we may be sure, if his body could have been found, the Jews would have discovered and exposed it; as it must have afforded the most complete conviction of the falsity of his doctrine, and confuted every pretension to the divine nature of Christ. The resurrection of Jesus having been in all ages considered as the vital spring and centre of our religion, from which all other rays of evidence diverge, and on which our own hopes of immortality are built.

The appearances of Christ after his death and burial were not sudden, or made to a single person, but to five hundred brethren at once. He did not flit before their eyes like a phantom, but conversed with them as a man, and taught them as their Lord. He assured them of

his being really alive after his passion by the most infallible proofs; by directing their attention to the marks of the nails which had pierced his feet and hands at his crucifixion; by shewing them the cavity in his side that had been made by the spear, and through which, which afforded the most satisfactory evidence of his death, *came there out blood and water.* And when one of them refused assent to his corporeal resurrection, unless he had sensible proof by touching his body, and by thrusting his hand into his side; he condescended to grant him this irrefragable, and it would seem unreasonable satisfaction: when conviction at once flashed upon his mind, and he exclaimed in terms in which no true Christian will ever hesitate to join, *My Lord and my God.*

To us who enjoy the full light of the Gospel, it may seem wonderful, that the apostles should have been so little inclined to credit the resurrection of our Saviour, after he had repeatedly promised them, that he would arise from the tomb: but our surprise will be considerably diminished,

nished, if we bear in mind the notion which universally prevailed concerning the Messiah, which became a stumbling block to the Jews in general, and so far influenced the opinions of the disciples, as to bewilder them in popular prejudice, and leave them, in the interval between his death and resurrection, forlorn and disconsolate. It would not be uninteresting to recal to our memories the prophecies in which Christ declared to them the extent of his sufferings, and his final conquest over death and the grave. They had the more reason to remember, and to rely on the prophecy of his resurrection, as it was uttered at the same time in which he had warned them of his apprehension, and its consequences. He had foretold the particular circumstances, and the effects it would produce on his followers; the treachery of one disciple, the denial of another, and the desertion of all; with such minute accuracy, as must, we should have supposed, removed every doubt of his universal prescience, and afforded the fullest assurance, that whatever he had

predicted would be literally and exactly fulfilled.

I should exceed the limits of a common discourse, were I to follow the types and prophecies by which the resurrection of Christ was represented in the Old Testament: neither is it necessary to mention the plain and positive promises of his return to life, and the instructions which he gave to the disciples a few hours preceding his passion. It is worthy of remark, however, and of great importance to the right understanding of Christianity, that this stupendous instance of omnipotency is not to be attributed to the Father alone; but to the united operation of the Deity, we must believe, that *as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.* Christ claims to himself the power of rising again, as well as the merit of his humiliation; as he was voluntarily *delivered for our offences*, so did he by his own power *rise again for our justification. No man*, saith he, *taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself, I have power to lay it down, and I have power*

power to take it again. And when the Jews, incensed at his pretending to more zeal for religion than themselves, and at an exertion of authority superior to their own, required of him a sign, *seeing that he did these things*, he replied, *destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up:* no one can doubt, or deny, that this predicted his resurrection from the grave, and was an express avowal of divine authority; for the Evangelist immediately subjoins, *But he spake of the temple of his body*, which was, indeed, the most holy temple that ever was, or could be raised, since in it *dwelt the fullness of the godhead:* and the disciples applied these words, and construed them as a prophecy and promise of his return to life again, for in the verse immediately following we read, that *when he was risen from the dead, they remembered, that he had said this unto them, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had said.*

The resurrection of our Saviour affords the strongest assurance that we ourselves shall not for ever sleep in the chambers of

death, and furnishes the most serious and important reflections on the consequences of a life to come, and a resurrection to judgment. Without an express revelation from Heaven confirmed to us by the resurrection of Christ, we could have had no proof that we should ever return to life again, after having once sunk to the grave: however strong and probable might have been the conjecture, from the state of mankind in this world, we could have had no positive evidence of it. Reason, perhaps, might, and we read, did, sometimes discover a distant gleam, did cherish an uncertain hope of immortality; the promiscuous, and seemingly unequal distribution of happiness, the frequent prosperity of the wicked, and the calamities of the good, afforded to contemplative minds a strong presumption, that there must be another world: here *all things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, vice is often triumphant, and virtue oppressed; it is necessary, therefore, for the vindication of divine justice, that there should be another

another existence, where there will be an equitable distribution of reward, and a just discrimination of punishment.

A stedfast expectation of that awful day in which *we shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and come forth either to the resurrection of life or of damnation*, cannot fail to have the most powerful influence on the opinions of men, their conduct, and their minds. If we look forward to another world with hope, that hope must be built on the inestimable benefits which Christ has purchased for us; we know, assuredly, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, and that holiness is only to be attained by a prompt obedience to the commands of our Redeemer, and a fixt belief in his almighty name. We are told in scripture that by no other name, but that of Jesus Christ, can we be saved. If we have trusted in the name or influence of any other, if we have built up a fabric of ostentatious virtue, and relied on any thing we have done; at the resurrection we shall find ourselves miserably deceived; our pile of goodness will share the

the fate of that house which the foolish man built upon the sand. If we have been ambitious only of being esteemed good moral characters, and taken credit to ourselves that our neighbours have suffered from us no injury; if we claim or expect reward for having been honest in our dealings, and honourable in our lives: if we think morality, even of the purest nature, will avail us any thing at the bar of Christ, or at all counter-balance neglect of his worship, or disbelief of his word; the day of resurrection will be to us a day of dismay, and anguish, and shame. If we have gone farther, and have so far trifled with the truths of the Gospel, as to deride the religion of our Saviour, and thereby made a mock at his sufferings, and impiously scoffed at his name; our misery before our final departure from this world will, probably, begin: no rebel against his Maker was ever undaunted while he lingered on the bed of death; all props from earthly heroism at the hour of dissolution are vain, the derider of Christianity is then

left

left destitute of those supports which were wont to spur him on to a contempt of his Redeemer, and to glory in his crime: his spirits are then feeble and confused, to him who in health regarded religion as an idle tale, futurity must be blind, as he lived without faith, without hope he cannot but die: and at the resurrection how will his soul sink within him, how severe will be his anguish! when he shall behold arrayed in all his glory the Creator he abandoned, the Redeemer he despised, the God he wished to crush; no longer the meek and suffering Jesus, the patient and pitying Saviour: but an awful, upright, and impartial judge, from whose enquiring eye are no crimes concealed, no thoughts unknown, no secrets hid; at whose keen glance the guilty tremble, at the loud pealing of whose voice the sinner stands appalled, and even the sons of righteousness are dumb.———But here I pause, nor dare I attempt to paint the tremendous visage of avenging omnipotence.

A far

A far different prospect does the resurrection afford *to them, who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality:* to those who have endeavoured to obey the precepts of Christ, and to form their lives by his example, the day of retribution has no terrors, relying on the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, they look up with humble confidence to the throne of grace, and behold with meek devotion and stedfast hope, their Saviour distributing equal justice tempered with mercy: aware that their own merits can never entitle them to the joys of Heaven, they rest their hopes of salvation on the mercy of their judge; and through his clemency alone they hope to receive those crowns of glory which he purchased for them by his blood, when their souls will thrill with extacy at the publication of these words of comfort. *Come ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.*

SERMON

SERMON XX.

ON THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES*.

St. Matthew, xvi. latter part of verse 3.

O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times.

After the fame of our Saviour's miracles and preaching had extended over the whole land of Judea, and all men had been struck with the coincidence of his character with the prophecies relating to the promised Messiah: the Pharisees and Sadducees came to him, tempting him, and desired that he would shew them a sign from heaven. This they did, not in the expectation that he would gratify them in their request, but in the hope

* Fast Sermon, 1807.

that

that he would fail in the attempt, and thus furnish them with indubitable evidence of the imposition of his character, and the fallacy of the people's hopes. He answered them with a familiar allusion to the common prognostics of the weather, and reprehended them for their pretended knowledge of the seasons, the uncertainty of which has been ever proverbial, and their ignorance of the signs of that extraordinary season which gave birth to events long before predicted, at that very time ardently expected, and on which the hopes, not only of the Jews, but of remote and dissimilar nations had been fixed. The signs of the advent of the Messiah had been distinctly foretold, and were then clearly visible, the prophecies were literally accomplishing, the scepter was departing from Judah, and the period appointed by the prophet Daniel was supposed, and justly to have elapsed. Yet was their incredulity insuperable: the Jews suffered the punishment of their perverseness, and were soon after overwhelmed in long menaced destruction,

and

and unparalleled distress. The Jewish people, at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, were besotted with wickedness, and blinded by excess. The signs of the coming of the Son of man were direct and clear, and blazoned in their sight; yet they remained impenitent, obstinate, and unconvinced. Thinking men of every age since the destruction of the state, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, have reprobated their perverseness, wondered at their incredulity, and have affected to treat their conduct and opinions as the effects of the most unexampled blindness, infatuation, and unbelief. Their conduct, however, and their prejudices, were as much the natural consequences of habit and vicious propensities, as of any mistake in the prophecies, and we are compelled sometimes to confess by a recollection of the practice of past ages, and a due reflection on our own, that the behaviour and the fate of the Jews were not less natural, than dreadful, were not more closely coincident with former predictions, than the proper

consequence

consequence of corruption, and the merited penalty of guilt.

It is not, however, to call your attention to the fate or corruption of the Jewish nation, that we are now assembled, but to deprecate the vengeance of Heaven for our own evil practices, to confess guilt, and beseech the protection of the Almighty, as much to prevent us from falling into vice and habitual depravity, as to implore success in our national enterprises, the security of our domestic comforts, and the preservation of our commonwealth. I know of no greater inducement to practise holiness, to enter earnestly into supplications for divine mercy and forgiveness, and to consider justly the rational grounds of national and religious hope, than a review of the signs of the times, of these eventful times, big with the fate of empires, stained with apostacy, and loaded with guilt.

If we had been left without any prediction of apostacy, if we lived in an age when every thing passed, and was conducted in regular uniformity, and events happened

happened in ordinary and common course, a consideration of the prophecies relating to the latter times would be unseasonable and unavailing, as all conjectures of the future will be in some measure fanciful, and must be ever uncertain. But the signs of these times are so marked and uncommon, and so unaccountable from any ground of reason or nature, that the most indifferent among us is prompted to enquire whether such events as have of late years past before us, and are now filling us with alarm and astonishment, were ever expected, whether there ever lived any set of men, or any single man, whose fancy conceived, or who ever ventured to predict, the fall of ancient and seemingly stable governments, an almost general defection from Christianity, and a period of triumphant infidelity and crime.

That such men have lived, that such times have been predicted, no one can be ignorant who is acquainted with his Bible; and it is only necessary to enquire whether their predictions have been ac-

complished, or are now accomplishing, whether they seem yet remote, and to be expected in a future age, or whether the events appear to be near us, and are fulfilling in our own. We need not search deep into the sacred volume to discover predictions, of which the events now passing before our eyes appear to be accomplishments. The first and most prominent feature in the class of prophecies which remain to be fulfilled, as well as that which commands particular attention, is conceived in the words of our Saviour. It has been the general belief in all nations and ages of Christendom, that the prophecy which our Saviour uttered before his last entrance into Jerusalem had a double intention, a two-fold application, and related as much to the end of the world, the consummation of all things, as to the circumstances of the destruction of the holy city, the disperson of the Jewish people, and the ruin of the Jewish state. And however absurd would be the conduct, to give up ourselves to anxiety and despair, to relinquish all attention to secular

secular concerns, and leave our temporal interests to chance and disorder, yet it would evince obstinacy as inveterate, security as false, and, perhaps, I may say, infidelity as sinful, to deny that *the face of the* political *sky* is darkened with signs portentous to every nation in the universe, destructive to their peace, indefinable in their consequences, and surpassing all human calculation.

We hear *of wars, and of rumours of wars:* of wars not entered into, and conducted to obtain or defend a disputed territory, to secure hereditary succession, or establish national superiority, but of wars, the motives and consequences of which are the extinction of national existence, the attainment of universal empire, and the extermination of independent states. That wars of recent date, and those which are now waging before us, are permitted by divine Providence we are sure; how far they may tend to the accomplishment of prophecy, how far they may be directed by the guidance of Almighty wisdom, it is not for us to say,

or to conjecture. Because the armies of our enemies are commanded, and, perhaps, it may not be unfair to affirm, generally consist of those whose cruelty and crimes have astonished the nations of Europe, and have tarnished the name and character of man, we must not cherish the hope that therefore their arms are unassisted, that therefore their aims are obnoxious to the supreme Governor of the world, and cannot be ultimately crowned with success. The same may be said of them, and, probably, with equal propriety, that God declared by the mouth of Moses to the people of Israel, *not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thy heart, dost thou go to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations, the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee.* And it is certain, that the wickedness of the nations which have suffered most from the arms of invaders has been great and notorious. Without being biassed by the belief and opinions of Protestants, that these calamities have been produced chiefly by the errors, and are the proper consequences

consequences of the corruptions of the papacy, which, indeed, the present war may seem in some measure to contradict, we may safely aver that every people which have been overrun by the arms of our enemies have been famous for apostacy, have produced many champions of infidelity, and have nurtured, and been seduced by, the disciples of a false philosophy, subversive of the honour, and hostile to the religion of Christ. It was principally in the countries which are now drinking the bitter waters of affliction, that those schools and societies were formed, whose object, and too often whose successful employment, it was to crush the religion of our Saviour, and to rear in its stead systems of a false and specious morality, which gave birth to, and supported, those pernicious doctrines that have fostered the spirit of discontent, anarchy, and misrule, by which the present times are distinguished, and which has deluged the continent of Europe with wars, massacres, and outrages, unprecedented in history, and such as language

has not power, nor humanity the nerves to describe. It is in consequence of the doctrines edited by these societies, that *men's hearts* are now *failing them for fear.* It is in consequence of plans formed by the disciples of modern ethics, misnamed philosophy, that these signs have appeared on the earth, *distress of nations, with perplexity.* It is, we trust, in consequence of this nation's general, I should rejoice to have said universal, rejection of these impious doctrines, that we have hitherto been spared from the swords, the insults, and rapine, of our enemies, and that the Almighty *has not* yet *given us over as a prey unto their teeth.*

But the manners and conversation of our own people too closely correspond with the character given by the apostles of the latter times, to suffer us to claim an exemption from the general charge of apostacy; and are of themselves sufficient to fill the pious with lamentation, and the considerate with dread. We have not only to regret, that in our age *perilous times* are *come*, but that the behaviour and

conversation of the world at large evince a lukewarmness of religion, a decay of piety, and a want of zeal for the Christian faith. Into what company of those who profess themselves Christians can we enter in which a thankfulness of the Almighty protection is expressed; in which, if a subject of a religious tendency is by any chance started, if an instance of the merciful kindness of Providence is narrated, is not immediately superseded by the garrulity of the frivilous, or if pursued and tolerated is not soon checked by the coldness of disgust. Is not this a proof, that the men of the present generation are *lovers of their ownselves, unthankful, unholy, high-minded, lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God.* This inaptitude to ascribe unto God the honour due unto his name, this reluctance to engage in serious conversation, is too universal, too characteristic of the present age to escape the observation of any one; and it is this indifference to every subject pertaining to God and righteousness, that renders days of abstinence particularly necessary. An

unwillingness

unwillingness to own, and to rely on the superintendence of God, is not less common than impious, and betrays a hardiness of soul, a blindness to every thing relating to godliness, that cannot but give pain to every considerate mind: and this too amidst multiplied and continual evidences of an over-ruling Providence. Eight days have not yet passed away, since our own neighbourhood witnessed the power and displeasure of him, "who rides in the "whirlwind, and directs the storm*;" since the fury of the elements afforded a melancholy proof of Almighty correction, of the vanity of human security, and the futility of human hope. Our shores are still strewed with fragments of the most perfect models of mortal invention, the most compacted structures of art. It would be folly, it would be arrogance, it would be little less than absolute atheism, to deny that these were not the visitations of unerring Justice, that they were instances of the power of the highest, the

* February 18, 1807.

manifest

manifest dispensations of Providence, and, it may be, the warnings of woe. With equal facility could the Ruler of the universe have swept this whole land with the *besom of destruction*, and filled the heart of every inhabitant with consternation and dismay. Have we a settled confidence, a well grounded hope, that this shall not be our fate? Are we entitled to think, or to persuade ourselves, that this nation is not reserved as the last, the most terrible example of Almighty vengeance? We do, indeed, annually assemble to appease the justice, and sue for the mercy of God. But do we afford any proof that our hearts become more pure, are our manners more amiable, our dispositions more charitable, our lives more virtuous, or our corruptions less? There are not a few among us, who cannot remember a year, with but one single exception, that we have not been called together as a whole people, to bewail our infirmities, to confess our guilty practices, to promise obedience for the future as well implore forgiveness for the past.

Have

Have these days of abstinence, and national contrition, had their proper effects, in rendering us more humble, more pious, more strongly impressed with the necessity of the protection of God, of more uniform obedience, and of reformation of heart? How these questions can be answered, our own consciences can best tell. It surely behoves us to confess not only in this day of national humiliation, but in stedfast contrition and humility, and in our private as well as public devotions, that although we have been visited beyond other nations with many spiritual and temporal blessings we have forgotten, that it is God's hand from which they flow, and that he would by goodness and long suffering lead us to repentance. Let us not gaze with stupid wonder, but look with awful reverence, and a hope of divine protection, on *the Signs of the Times.* Let us earnestly implore our beneficent and Almighty Father to " give us all grace to " walk in the ways of our holy profession, " that he may delight to dwell among us, " and to do us good: and that his holy " worship

" worship and service, which we now
" enjoy, may, through his Providence and
" mighty protection, be continued to us,
" and our posterity in this his house for
" ever. Grant this, O Lord, for Jesus
" Christ's sake, our only Mediator and
" Advocate."

THE END.

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